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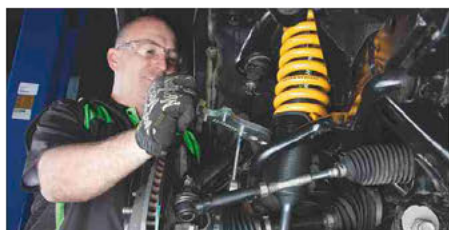
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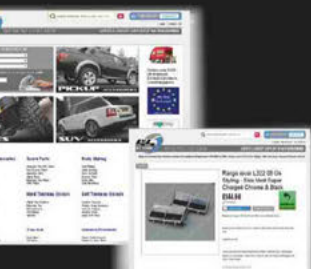
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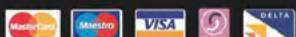
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Taking a trip into the past driving an original

Driving towards Heathrow airport, for an early – very early – flight to Frankfurt, to drive an original 1992 Suzuki Vitara, I will confess to thinking that I should still be in bed...

Rapidly developing technology is a fact of life. Everything gets more sophisticated, and more mind-bendingly baffling. You see youngsters using tablets while still strapped in pushchairs. Of course, it's not for them to reflect on how all this stuff actually works, they just accept this technology as 'normal'. Quizzical reflection and head shaking is left to us mature members of society, who can remember the world before everything became digital. Now, before you get the idea that this is going to be a 'grumpy ol' man' rant, let me confess that the latest 4x4 technology absolutely fascinates me. As regular readers will know, this magazine proudly covers the very latest developments of companies like Jaguar Land Rover; we are often astonished learning what is now possible. We have visited that company's Virtual Reality Cave in the design department and stood slack-jawed in our 3D-glasses, completely amazed at what is now possible. Absolutely brilliant. However, there are times to reflect...

Last month, the bedside alarm woke me at 4am, and within half an hour I was thrashing along the M25 in our long term test Toyota RAV4 comfortably ensconced in the excellent multi adjustable leather seats, listening to Radio 4 on the DAB digital radio, allowing the cruise control to keep me within the speed limits, cruising in sixth gear towards Heathrow airport, and an early – very early – flight to Frankfurt, to drive an original 1992 Suzuki Vitara. At the time, I will confess to thinking that I would be better off still in bed...

The full story of the Vitara starts on page 48 of this issue, where we are looking at the importance of Suzuki's SUV, and explain just why it is such an important vehicle in the history of 4x4s. For this enthusiast, the day in Germany for this feature will long remain a highlight. As Editor of this magazine, I get the opportunity to drive some great new 4x4s, often in some very special places, but in many ways, this 1992 Vitara drive tops the lot. Without wanting to give too much away here, the important part of the drive was that I was in an original Vitara, not a rebuilt, restored model benefiting from improved replacement parts or upgrades. This vehicle had benefited from a charmed and low mileage life, yet switching on the ignition, I can confess to wondering what would happen; lumpy tick-over, perhaps, needing me to tickle the throttle carefully until the engine was up to working temperature. There was none of that. It was smooth and eager, belying the fact that it was some 23-years old. Off into the German traffic was surely going to be daunting, and involve frantic effort to keep out of the way of every Mercedes-Benz driver intent on proving they were as good as, or probably better, than Nico Rosberg or Sebastian Vettel. But the Vitara was nonplussed, and it quickly became obvious that it was more than capable to mix it with the modern high tech world. It was simple, but simple remains good. Manual five speed, slightly vague steering, but the wonderfully enthusiastic 1.6-litre injected four cylinder engine allowed me to have one of the best day's driving for a very long while. There were no electronic sensors to decide which wheel needed exactly how much drive. If I wanted four-wheel drive I was going to have to move the small stubby transfer lever. It was bliss. The smile from my face took some time to fade. Viva Vitara!

Here's hoping you too enjoy the simple things in life.

Nigel Fryatt, Editor

OFF-ROADING WITH US THIS MONTH



Ros Woodham has returned from crossing the Simpson Desert, Australia. Check out her holiday snaps on page 34



Introducing one very talented rally driver and off-road instructor. Hils Everitt gets to know Jeanette James on page 58



If you can't buy a Hummer, then obviously you build one using a Discovery base vehicle! It's all explained on page 64



YOUR 4X4 LIFE

88



**Tough
Toyota
truck**



**Perodua
Kembara
no less!**

COVER STORY

VIVA VITARA!

EUROPE'S FIRST 4x4 SUV **42**

Back in 1988, Suzuki unveiled a vehicle that was to start a whole new trend. How did it become to be so influential?

IN THE BEGINNING... **48**

We found an original Suzuki Vitara, flew out to Germany to meet the man who owns it, and slipped back in time...

ADVERTISING BREAK **55**

Looking at how the original Vitara was promoted

FIRST DRIVE: NEW VITARA **56**

And it's back! Suzuki has now launched the very new Vitara. It has a lot to live up to. Is it good enough?

BUYING YOUR FIRST 4x4 **24**

If you are looking to buy your very first 4x4, then take some hints from us to ensure you get exactly what you want

ADVENTURE: ACROSS THE SIMPSON **34**

One glorious off-road adventure. Check out Ros Woodham's excellent photographs as she crosses the Aussie desert

4x4 INTERVIEW: JEANETTE JAMES **58**

This is one serious off-road rally driver. We sent Hils Everitt to check out one lady's dedicated challenge to be the best

DISCOVER THE HUMMER **64**

If you cannot actually find the Humvee that you require, then obviously you build one using a Discovery base vehicle. Really?

TECH: FOAM CELL SUSPENSION **70**

If you thought you knew everything about shock absorbers, then read this and learn about the benefits of Foam Cell shocks

BUYING GUIDE: SUZUKI GRAND VITARA **96**

With our history of the Vitara this month, it seemed sensible to consider what to look for with a second-hand Grand

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Hats off to SEAT

OUR 4x4S **82**

The latest Fleet News

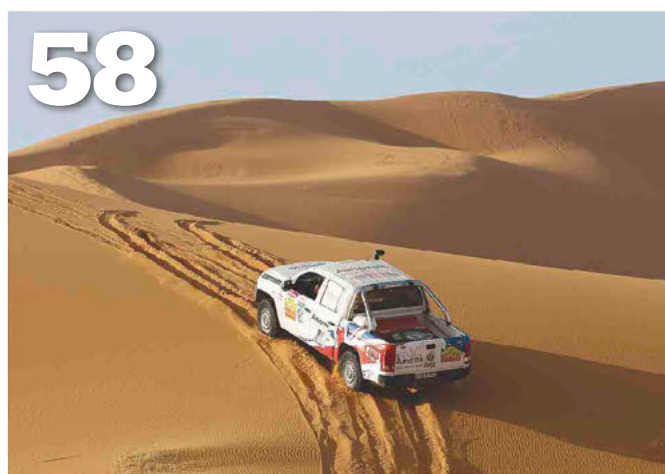
COOKE'S COLUMN **114**

It's all steam trains this month...

- News from around the Clubs
- Pay and Play dates
- Auction news and prices
- Focus on: Honda CR-V



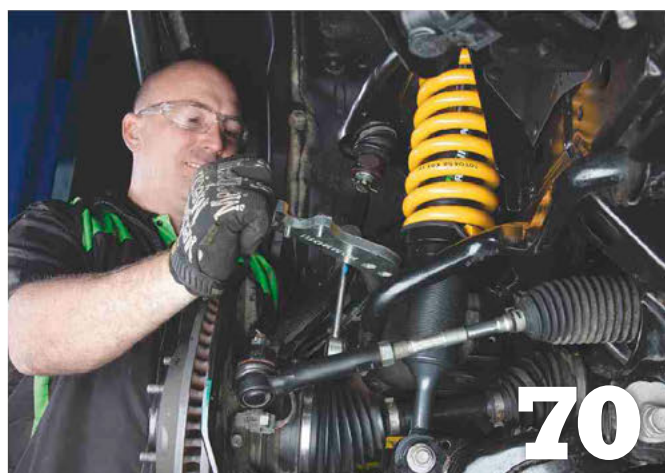
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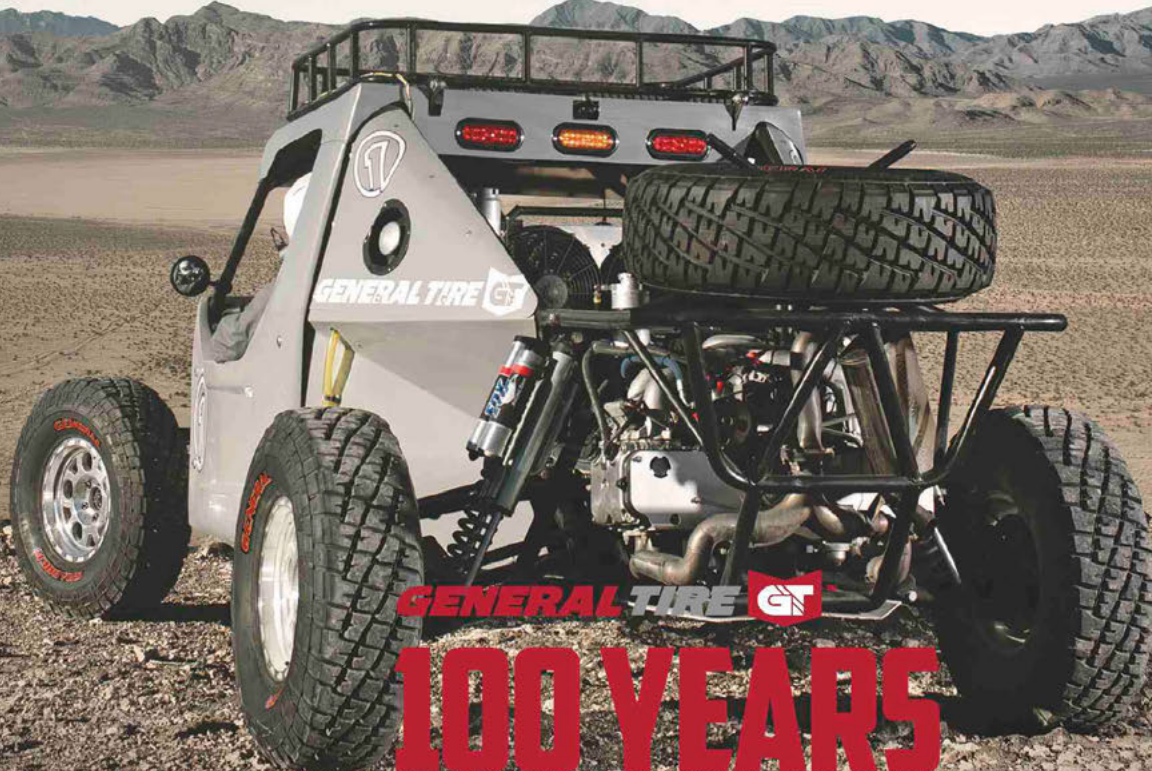
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News & Views

INSIDE THE WORLD OF 4X4



COMING SOON!

THIS YEAR'S GENEVA MOTOR SHOW REVEALS SOME SIGNIFICANT NEW SUVS

THE ANNUAL GENEVA Motor Show can be seen as a thermometer of the global motor industry, since this is the one that many manufacturers target to unveil their new concepts – often having already decided that these will go into production, but want some pre-launch publicity. In particular, Geneva always seems to be the place to see some of the most outrageous supercars. During leaner years, when the supercars go missing, you know times are tight. This year, however, there were a lot of them! British manufacturer McLaren had so many models it looked like the company had gone into mass production. Bentley came out with a real stunning sports car and, Lamborghini too had a variety of extreme machines, including one that looked like the Batmobile meets Dick Dastardly! However, when these outrageous machines appear, it's likely that there will be some decent 4x4s on show for the first time, and that was certainly the case for 2015.

SUZUKI'S MINI 4X4

As you will see elsewhere in this issue, we have been celebrating Suzuki's 4x4 heritage with our special report on the Vitara. It's appropriate, therefore, that the company should unveil a brand new 'concept' in the Geneva, the iM-4 (pictured

here). Appropriate, and hopefully an indication of the future. Apparently, according to the details released, the iM-4 is: "pure yet lovable, and innovative yet retro"... Ignoring such drivel, the iM-4 looks to us to be an interesting new addition to the company's growing range.





**ICON
LIMITED
EDITIONS**
PAGE 13



**NEW
SUZUKI
VITARA**
PAGE 56



**HOME
BUILT
HUMMER**
PAGE 64



the B-segment SUV range (thought by most experts as the most significant in the market; 20 per cent of the entire UK SUV market in 2014) and so will be up against some serious competition. Pictured left, it is built on a new platform, obviously with a new body, this is the first model to be produced since the merger of SsangYong and Mahindra & Mahindra. Available with either petrol or diesel 1.6-litre engines, manual or automatic and the range will include two and four-wheel drive versions. The 4x4 system will be an on-demand option and will have Hill Start Assist. SsangYong proudly claim that, "Tivoli offers a highly competent off-road capability. With a 167mm ground clearance, approach angle of 20.8 degrees, 28.0 degree departure angle, and 18.7 degree ramp angle, a highly effective performance off-road is assured." North America is included in Mahindra & Mahindra's ambitious long term plans for this marque. ➤

This model would be based on a completely new model platform, and it is intended as a 4x4. Full details are limited at the moment, but it is claimed to have good ground clearance, helped by the 18 inch wheels, and would be a hybrid, powered by a 1.2-litre engine and Suzuki's SHVS system (Smart Hybrid Vehicle by Suzuki). We'd like to know more, since despite being a concept, it looks a production possibility to us.

MAZDA SMALL SUV

While the small Suzuki 4x4 was a concept, Mazda unveiled the production version of the new CX-3 (pictured right). This will have an

extensive range of no less than 18 different models, including front-wheel drive only versions, but at the top of the range will be three 4WD models. The 150bhp petrol version will only be available with manual transmission, while there will be both manual and automatic versions of the 105bhp diesel unit. The model range goes on sale in the UK this June.

SSANGYONG'S ALL NEW SUV

The new Tivoli from SsangYong is going to be the most significant model produced by the South Korean manufacturer. It fits into



MITSUBISHI'S NEW L200 UNVEILED

STILL THOUGHT BY many to be the pick-up that started the trend of 'lifestyle' working trucks, Mitsubishi chose the Geneva Motor Show to unveil the very distinctive new version of the successful L200. We have yet to see the model in the metal and so are relying on the photographs published here, but it certainly looks like the front has been updated. The familiar 'organic' profile remains, but it is inside that the biggest changes appear and the interior looks much improved. We have often commented that the centre console including the satnav and entertainment systems have always looked a little 'add on', but this new model seems a lot better. Under the bonnet there is a completely new 2.4-litre MIVEC turbodiesel engine, producing 178bhp and 430Nm of torque. An all-new six-speed manual gearbox will be available, with an automatic version with paddle-shift change an option. Mitsubishi claim that the engine is quieter, and with some additional noise-reducing measures, the interior of the L200 should be much quieter. A quicker steering gear ratio should also mean the new L200 will be a touch more precise. Refining and reinforcing the L200's body structure is claimed to give the truck some seven per cent more torsional rigidity over the original. Additional new features include keyless ignition, rear view camera, and DAB digital radio. All L200s are built in Thailand and the model will be launched to Europe in the summer of 2015 and models should be available in the UK in July. When we have more details, we will let you know. We certainly look forward to getting behind the wheel.

News & Views

GENEVA MOTOR SHOW *CONTINUED*



◀ HYUNDAI TUCSON

Hyundai introduced the completely new Tucson at the Geneva Motor Show (above). This is a larger C-segment SUV, and will be produced on a completely new platform. It will also be available as a 48V-Hybrid version and a plug-in Hybrid version. Hyundai has actually produced over one million SUVs to the European market, so this new model is important to the company. Emphasising cabin space and luggage capacity, this is likely to be a highly competitive family SUV. The model range will be extensive with a wide variety of power units available, including

a new turbodiesel 175bhp 1.6-litre T-GDI engine with six-speed manual or seven-speed dual-clutch transmission, plus a petrol 1.6-litre GDI unit offering 132bhp and three diesels: 1.7-litre/115bhp, and 2.0-litre units in either 136bhp or 186bhp. Details have yet to be announced as to what models will be coming to the UK.

EVOQUE OPENS UP

Although not available until 2016, Land Rover unveiled the Evoque convertible at Geneva (below). Promotion for this new model has included it being driven through some of the Crossrail tunnels! For those who want to be seen driving an Evoque with the top down, there will be a wait, but the model continues to go from strength to strength and Geneva saw the latest versions of the Evoque range, claimed to be 18 per cent more efficient. Much of this is because the new model Evoques will be available with the new Ingenium 2.0-litre diesel engines, which are claimed to have emission levels as low as 109g/km and a fuel consumption of 68mpg. This makes the 2016 Evoque the 'most efficient Land Rover ever produced'. New grille designs, different LED headlamps and foglights will make the latest model visually different, but it will be the engine option that will make the difference. (It's

likely that this is the engine that will also find its way into the Discovery Sport). The success of the Evoque has led to no less than 3000 new jobs being created at Halewood, which is impressive.

Not announced, but certainly discussed at Geneva, was the comment that the new Defender may not now be with us until 2018. Whether the 'delay', if that's what it is, relates to the fact that the company is still a little unsure of what it will look like or whether the date has been chosen on purpose, is up for debate. As it happens, 2018 will be Land Rover's 70th Anniversary, so an ideal time to launch such an important model, but it had better be damned good!

JEEP'S NEW ENGINE

The Renegade took pride of place on the Jeep stand, with the very latest engine revealed for the first time. The 1.4-litre MultiAir produces 170bhp and is coupled to Jeep's excellent nine-speed automatic gearbox. The Trailhawk version of the Renegade with this engine will be the model to aspire to, and with the Active Drive II four-wheel drive system will be a great little off-roader. The Jeep Renegade actually arrives in the UK this month, and we are looking forward to getting behind the wheel, on and off some UK roads. Full report in our June issue. The Jeep show stand also had Trailhawk versions of the Cherokee, a new special edition Wrangler and the mighty fast SRT version of the Grand Cherokee, proving that this manufacturer is well and truly back in business, with European sales confirming that the model range is being well received. Interestingly, if the rumours that the new Defender will not be available until 2018 are true, that will be launched the same year as the new Wrangler. Not that's going to be very interesting!





ICON CELEBRATIONS

IN CELEBRATION OF the final year's production of the Defender, the guys at Nene Overland have produced two great limited editions of their successful Defender Icon range. In many ways, this is also a celebration of Nene's history with the marque, as Andrew Harrison-Smith's company has now been operating for 27 years, and now employs 55 employees across its two sites. The first of the Icon limited editions will be the 49 Heritage, reflecting the existing Heritage Icons, these models are based on the Keswick green county station wagons with satin silver door hinges, front bumper and windscreen brackets. The rear is cleaned up with Icon's smooth cross member cover plate and NAS tow step, finished in Alpine white. The front lattice wire Series I grille will include a pair of spotlights mounted behind, much like the original 1949 model. Interior features include Keswick green dashboard with contrasting Alpine white centre panel and classic steering wheel. Melville and Moon sand canvas seat covers are added to the seats with matching centre cubby box, dash top pods and grab handle finish off the interior. The 49 Heritage edition 90 costs £35,995, while the 110 seven-seater is £39,995.

The second limited edition model is the Icon 67 Sport. It is available in a choice of colours, Coris grey or Santorini black, with contrasting satin black or grey anthracite roofs. Graduated privacy glass and the subtle addition of black sill protection checker plate and alloy treads finish off the 67 Sport's exterior. Inside the dashboard receives the Icon retro body colour finish with contrasting centre dash and black leather dash pods, grab handle and deep cushion cubby box. The cabin is fully carpeted and you get the Icon sports steering wheel. All standard Defender XS appointments will be incorporated in both these limited editions. The 67 Sports are priced at £39,995 for the 90 and £43,995 for the 110 version.

Only 67 Sport and 67 Heritage editions will be produced, and the first models should be available for late summer. Special order left-hand drive versions are available at £1000 extra. If you are interested, then we suggest you take a visit to one of the two Nene Overland sites at Peterborough (01733 380687) or Maidenhead (01628 671250) or check the company's websites: www.defendericon.com and www.neneoverland.co.uk

TANG GOES ELECTRIC

IT'S FAIR TO say that it surprises us that the Chinese motor industry seems to be dedicated to looking at what other manufacturers are doing and producing versions 'inspired' by the competition. Some would call this copying, and when you look at the recent LandWindX7, the comment that this has a 'striking resemblance' to the Evoque seems to be a massive understatement. Last month we had the Beijing BJ80, and wondered exactly what Mercedes-Benz had to say about it given its similarity to the G-Class! Obviously, it's not all about following and we were intrigued this month to see that the order books are now open in China for the new BYD Tang. Checking the photograph, it is not so obvious what it is 'inspired' by, and anyway most SUVs in the class all seem to have similar designs. The important part about the Tang is that it is a dual mode electric SUV. It is claimed to accelerate to 60mph in 'less than five seconds' and has a fuel consumption claimed to be 'nearly equal to 147mpg'. The Tang is built by BYD Company Ltd, China's leading electric vehicle manufacturer. Obviously we cannot confirm these claims and have yet to see the vehicle in the metal, but it is an interesting development. How long, we wonder, before the Chinese stop getting 'inspired' and start exporting unique home designed SUVs. And if you have never heard of BYD, it is also reported that back in 2008, American entrepreneur Warren Buffett invested \$232million into the company to take a 9.89 per cent stake – and he's not known for wasting his money...



GENERAL HITS 100

POPULAR US TYRE brand General Tire is celebrating its Centenary this year. Started by William F. O'Neill and Winfred E. Fouse in Akron, Ohio, the company started with the wonderfully named General Balloon Jumbo tyres for cars! These were popular as they required a lower air pressure than many tyres, and therefore gave a more comfortable ride than other brands. In the 1950s the company started to supply General Motors with OE tyres, before branching out into aerospace and defence products. The German tyre company Continental acquired the US tyre operations in 1987, and the company changed its name to Continental Tire North America in 2000. For many off-road enthusiasts, however, they will simply be General tyres or even just 'Grabbers' after one of the most popular 4x4 tyres on the market.



DONINGTON 4X4 SHOW BACK TO ITS BEST

There's been an indoor 4x4 show at the Donington race track in Northamptonshire since 2002 on and off, *writes Hills Everitt*. The format, however, has changed over the years, but for the third year running it is firmly back where the original British Indoor 4x4 Show started.

Held in mid February, this indoor event kicks off the show season and this year it was launched with a bang. Bigger than ever, Donington's exhibition hall was bursting with stands, many brand new to the event and plenty of old friends keen to get their products on show to the mass of punters.

Yes, there's always a healthy smattering of Land Rover Defenders and the odd Discovery on display, but it's always great to see the Jeep Club and their modded Wranglers plus 'J33p' and the Jeep Monkeys plus plenty of Japanese pick-up trucks, with the Mitsubishi L200 Club in attendance on a sizeable stand, and a knarly truck showing just what you can do with your vehicle if you really want to have

some serious fun with like-minded owners.

As always, there is a good representation from the travel companies offering 4x4 trips in the UK and around the world. Waypoint Tours and Atlas Overland were including the popular trips to Morocco which is still the place to go in Africa now that much of the continent is now out of bounds. Battlefields by 4x4 was advertising its 4x4 tours to Normandy discovering battlefields, memorials and cemeteries – a very welcome addition that doesn't require modded 4x4s; just gentle lanes and fascinating features. Then there's Vampire Tours that feature World War II tours as well as those venturing off to Transylvania, Mongolia, Poland and Georgia. Another new area of 4x4 travel was displayed by One Life Adventure, with its Greece and Turkey tours to add an extra flavour to the tour market.

Lighting systems, recovery gear, interior upgrades, winches, truck tops, such as from Xtreme Sales and Goodwinch and overlanding

equipment was well represented, as was clothing, parts and tools.

A very welcome sight was the designated car park for those who wanted to show off their 4x4s right outside the exhibition hall. There is no competition for the best 4x4, modded or unmodded in the modern Donington Show, just a chance to show off and discuss your vehicle with admirers and those who need advice. A row was dedicated to the Jeep owners with some fine Wranglers on display; and we spied an old friend - a black, ex-military Hummer even more modded than when we featured it in this magazine a few years ago!

For the first time also there was a showing from manufacturers, including Jeep (showing off the new Renegade), Isuzu and SsangYong via local dealers. It reminds us of the old days of the OR&4WD show when they all turned up. Let's hope the show continues to expand into a truly impressive all-marque 4x4 show. **4x4**





We first met this ex-military HumVee in 2009 and was unexpectedly pleased to renew its acquaintance in the outside area designated to owners' 4x4s - it's changed a lot...



G-Force 4x4 is well known for Jeep modifications, but also now produces impressive kit for assorted pick-up trucks - here a smart, tough-looking Nissan Navara



No Donington Show would be complete without a macho Defender showing its extreme capability



Lighting systems were well represented at the indoor show and always attract plenty of attention. Tune in, switch on



Battlefields by 4x4 is a relatively new company with superb guided tours across Normandy - we hope to join them...



Amid the shiny new 4x4s all over the place, all with loads of kit, was parked this stunning old Toyota Land Cruiser for sale. Tempted? Someone must have been...



Tom's Fahrzeugtechnik is a regular at 4x4 shows, displaying the excellent Toyota Land Cruiser camper conversion. Makes you want to drive it away instantly...



Jeep owners from Jeepey.com were allotted a special area in the car park for showgoers to admire their impressive range of members Wranglers. Love 'em all (the Jeeps that is!)

Products

WHAT'S NEW FOR YOUR 4X4?



LIGHT IT UP!

Lazer has just released details of some new lamps that have been designed to fit a bespoke grille kit for the Land Rover Defender, and you have to



admit, they look excellent. Designed for 207 year onwards models, the Lazer Grille is a stylish option and allows for a simple installation of the Lazer lights. The grille is made from stainless steel and will allow the fitting of either the Lazer ST-4 or RS-4 lights, the latter allowing for a useful daylight running option. Designed and built in the UK, the grille and full fitting kit is available at £254 (inc VAT) and the lights, including the loom, are £789 (inc VAT) a pair for the ST-4 lights, and £879 (inc VAT) for a pair of the RS-4 versions.

Website: www.lazerlamps.com

TBR FITTING CENTRE

Here at *4x4 Magazine*, we are well aware of the quality of TBR accessories for the 4x4 enthusiast, be it roof racks or even snow ploughs, and have no hesitation in recommending the products. News has come to us this month that the company now has an official fitting centre in the East Midlands. This seems a very good idea to us, whether you are looking to fit accessories to an everyday working truck or fitting out a personal vehicle for an expedition. The full address of the new centre is: TBR & PR Customs, Unit 5, Oundle Marina, Barnwell Road, Oundle PE8 5PA.

Website: www.tbbruk.com

TIME TO CHARGE

Many overlanding 4x4s will have a multi battery system to run other items on a truck. The traditional method or recharging and maintaining this battery is to use a split relay system. However, using this method can have an effect on efficient charging, as there is a loss of voltage through resistance within the long wiring. To combat this, Ring Automotive has produced a new DC-to-DC battery charger, the RSCDC30. A SmartCharger, it is designed specifically to charge auxiliary batteries.

Website: www.ringautomotive.co.uk



DIESEL POWER PLUS

A new diesel engine additive is available from the guys at Tunit. It is claimed that Diesel Power Plus cleans an engine's injection system, provides a boost and promotes a longer life. One 'dose' should last around 12 months. The team at Tunit have explained that the DPP product has indeed been extensively tested by Cummins engines in the United States, and found that it has been seen to improve fuel efficiency by as much as 11 per cent. For anyone using their diesel powered 4x4 for any significant mileage, then a dose of DPP every year seems a pretty good option to us. If you want to know more give the guys at Tunit a call on 01257 274100 to find out more, or check out the specific DPP website.

Website: www.dieselpowerplus.co.uk



TOP, TOP MOUNTS

Off-roaders have tough lives and it is inevitable that a little wear and tear will occur. This is certainly the case with the suspension components, especially a vehicle's top mount; wear here and the spring will be able to 'move' and a vehicle's handling will deteriorate. SuperPro has just launched an impressive range of top mounts, designed for Ford, Isuzu, Mitsubishi, Nissan and Toyota vehicles. Each kit comes with all the parts needed for a simple fit and includes all strut mounts, springs seats, nuts, washers and boots, where appropriate. Prices for Nissan, Toyota, Mitsubishi, Isuzu and Ford pick-ups range from £69 to £99, with Shogun/Pajero kits available for £109 (all prices exclude VAT). For more information check out the SuperPro website.

Website: www.superpro.eu.com



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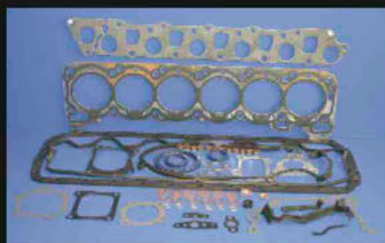
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Products

WHAT'S NEW FOR YOUR 4X4?



WHEEL AND TYRE COMBOS

Now is the time of the year when many off-roaders consider some new rubber, and in some cases, that obviously involves 'what will fit my wheels?'

One way to simplify all this is to buy a wheel and tyre combination, and if that's what you are considering, then contact the guys at Milner Off Road. These people know their stuff, and we have recently received details of a couple of very special offers available now. For the working truck owner, especially the farming community, then the Maxxis M8060 Trepadore mud terrain is a good choice, and bought from Milner Off Road is available on a Silver Modular Wheel at £435 (plus VAT) a set. One of the biggest sellers for Milner Off Road is the Maxxis MT764 Bighorn tyre, ideal for some serious off-roading, and fitted to a black eight spoke wheel is available at an impressive £480 (plus VAT) a set. Give them a call if you are interested, or indeed want some tyre and wheel advice, and remember to say *4x4 Magazine* sent you.

Website: www.milneroffroad.com

MAKING A QUICK FIST OF IT

Bouncing around in a 4x4, it doesn't take long to realise that things move and fall about, even when driving along a simple greenlane. Take a vehicle on a longer expedition, and having everything securely fastened is something of a prerequisite for a safe and successful trip. Quick Fist is an American company that makes some impressive clamps to ensure everything stays where it should, in sizes from 16mm to a serious 430mm. The clamps are made from heavy duty transportation grade rubber, they do not scratch or corrode tools, are UV resistant and can cope in severe hot and cold climates. They are now available in the UK from specialist company Sliding Systems, based near Wrexham in North Wales. For more information, check out the website.

Website: www.gsfpromounts.com



PROTECT YOUR WHEELS

This is the time of year when alloy wheels can really suffer. Let's be honest, winter is not the time when you rush out to clean the car, and given all the muck and salt that is on our roads at this time, your wheels can really suffer. As you might expect, Autoglym has just the product that both cleans and protects, and is therefore well worth the effort! The company actually claims that this product lasts up to 30 per cent longer than its competitors, and while that's very difficult to confirm or disprove, we have certainly always been impressed with Autoglym products. The product has been developed in secret in Abu Dhabi, in association with major wheel manufacturer Rimstock and is said to last up to six weeks, repelling both dirt and brake dust. If you have expensive alloy wheels on your truck, taking the time and effort to protect them seems something of a no-brainer to us. Autoglym products are available through many motor factor outlets, like Halfords. Check out the website to find the nearest stockist to you.

Website: www.autoglym.com



EVOQUE PERFORMANCE FILTER

The Range Rover Evoque has been around for a few years now, and it's likely that some might benefit from a new performance air filter available from Pipercross. This OEM-sized filter is designed for 2.2-litre models and is claimed to offer increased performance and to aid engine life. The design of the filter is a lightly oiled foam that uses much of the knowledge gained from Pipercross' BTCC motorsport experience (the team is supplying the majority of the 2015 grid). This additional performance comes at a sensible price with the filter available for £29.99 (plus VAT). Check out the website for more details.

Website: www.pipercross.com





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Spanish lessons

We have looked in detail at some of this year's Geneva Motor Show stars, but our columnist spotted another, more surprising, offering from SEAT...

So, the Geneva Motor Show has come and gone and thrown up a few tasty morsels for us 4x4 lot. As predicted, there were a number of concepts designed for us to drool over and admire (see *News*, page 10). One that did stick out as being rather off the wall in terms of 4x4s was the SEAT 20V20, meaning 'Vision 2020' and representing where the Spanish manufacturer sees itself in the year 2020.

Now, SEAT is not a company that one has previously been able to associate with the world of 4x4. We all know that every manufacturer these days feels the need to produce at least one 'SUV' in its line-up as 4x4s are all the rage at the moment and sales are very strong.

What is surprising is that it's taken SEAT this long, given its 65-year history and the fact that it's owned by Volkswagen, which itself boasts some pretty impressive 4x4s; and that this concept will only really come into being by 2020, which is a rather long lead-time to tap into that must-have, fast-growing SUV segment of the motoring market.

Well, we'll see just how long it does take to come into being, but I rather like the '20V20'. It's not so 'out there' as to look ridiculous. Of course, it echoes (evokes?) the current 'Evoque' mode of design, but those triangular headlamps, raised door line and strategically placed curves give it a very raunchy and tough look while still being easy on the eye; far more appealing than a lot of the Crossovers that we have been subjected to lately.

So well done SEAT, welcome to the gang, we watch with interest and hope to see the production SUV sooner than anticipated. Don't get too excited, however, as it will be an electronically operated all-wheel drive system, but we can't expect miracles, now can we?



This is the SEAT 20V20 announced at this year's Geneva Motor Show. Not a bad design for an SUV, but you have to wonder if the Spanish manufacturer is taking too long a time to join this ever more competitive marketplace

When I think of Spanish 4x4s, the Santana PS-10 and earlier Santana Land Rovers - which started production in 1958, built from kits sent from Solihull under licence - always spring to mind and put a smile on my face. The PS-10, a Land Rover lookalike that emerged once the licence ended in 1983, was rough 'n' ready and clunky, but was a terrific off-roader as you would expect. Having a new 4x4 designed and built in Spain is good news, and compared to current SEAT offerings, it looks good too; and it seems rather fitting that it emulates the Range Rover Evoque.

Talking of which, Geneva was also the launching point for the new 2016 Evoque with its 'Eco' qualities, which is highly admirable and will tick all those environmental boxes nicely and do well. Outwardly it's difficult to see much change, but it's all in the new range of smaller, cleaner engines, which are now claiming up to 68mpg and 109g/km.

What I am particularly pleased about is the final confirmation that the Evoque convertible will be in production soon. When the concept came out a few years ago I was very pleased - unlike many of my colleagues who thought it was a joke and merely to be sneered at as a surfer's patsy and no good to real 4x4ers. Well, I didn't and am looking forward to

getting my hands on one. I currently own a Jeep Grand Cherokee and a Mazda MX5 because I want a big capable 4x4 plus a fun, racy, little sports car. The Evoque convertible could mean I can do away with both these cars and get all my fun from the one: a decent, roomy 4x4 with a removable roof - hallelujah! Old Suzuki Vitaras or four-door Jeep Wranglers with huge removable hard roofs just don't work for this household.

My road tax would go down substantially, my finance payments would be halved and there'll be a whole garage free for junk and stuff. Although I have a problem in that we do tend to cart around a lot of gear, including four bikes (two mountain and two road) and take mountain holidays all year round so a lot of kit is always needed. Thinking logically about it, I'm not sure I can see the Evoque convertible quite satisfying in that department? That's another thing we'll have to wait and see about. Anyway, no point in seriously thinking about it now as I won't be able to afford a brand new one, and who knows what will be floating my boat in five years' time. That's another five Geneva Shows... **Hils**

PS: And as for the Aston Martin DBX electric-powered SUV concept; think I need a little more time to consider, very carefully, that one...



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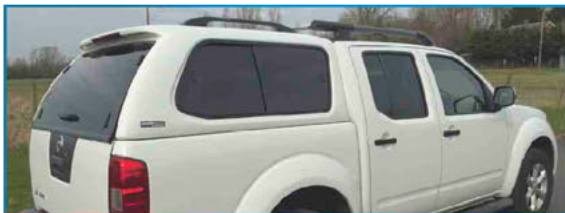
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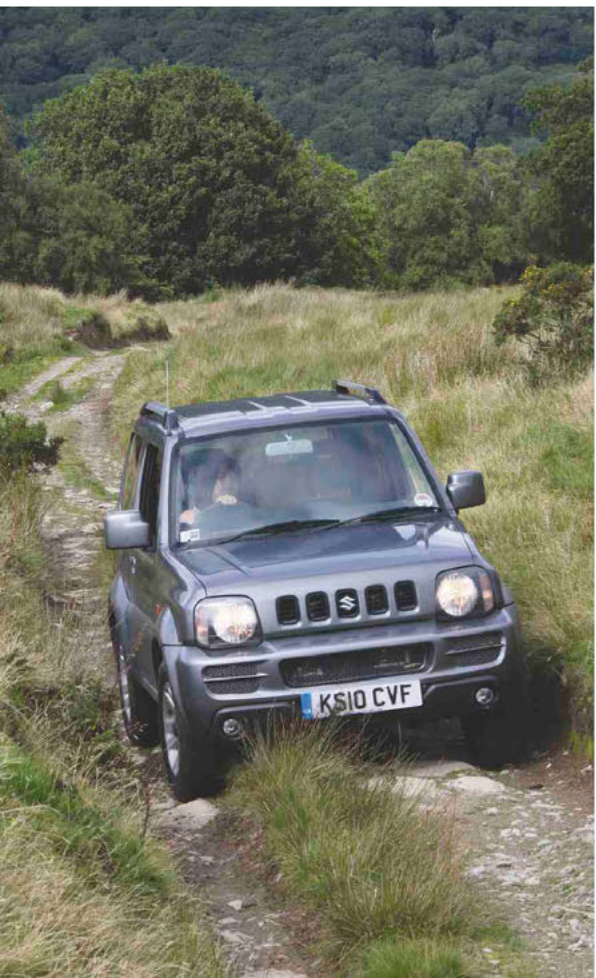


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BUYING ADVICE

Your first 4x4





BUYING YOUR **FIRST** 4x4

Been thinking about dipping a toe in the 4x4 market, but it's constantly expanding and with the variety of models on offer, feels too daunting to tackle? Fear not, help is at hand with this useful guide to what is out there and what you need to know to jump onto the first rung of the fantastic 4x4 ladder

Words: Hils Everitt

Working in the 4x4 world means one often gets asked: 'Which is the best 4x4?' The answer is:

'Well, it all depends on what you want it for'. Yes, every year we run our 4x4 Of The Year group test and, for 2015 the new Range Rover Sport won hands-down. But that doesn't mean it's the best 4x4 all round for everybody. We scored it high, because it offers the best of everything on and off-road in the perfect combination - in our eyes.

You can apply the same theory to buying your first 4x4. And that's because the answer to which one is right for you when you tip your toe into the wonderful world of 4x4 for the first time is also: 'Well, it all depends on what you want it for'. Of course, budget has to come high up on the important-factors-to-consider list. We don't all have £50,000-plus to splash out on a new Range Rover Sport (more's the pity).

Generally speaking, when the budget question is asked, then we invariably get the answer: 'Oh, around £15-20,000'. Now that gives a lot of scope, from excellent budget mini 4x4s, to quality medium-sized second-hand buys of a few years old, or the big boys in the Land Rover, Toyota, Jeep or pick-up truck markets that are up to 10 years old.

That is the thing about the 4x4 market these days; it is huge, and there are so many 4x4s to choose from. Having said that, we wouldn't really refer to a fair proportion of them as 'real' 4x4s. That modern term of

Crossover has entered the motoring vocabulary: but what does it really mean?

To us, it really implies a slightly higher-stanced hatchback that can have four driven wheels if the conditions dictate, thanks to a clever electronic clutch system. Most 4x4s are higher than normal saloons, although beware, as some crossovers are closer to standard car height. A key component is the Haldex clutch, introduced in 1998 and now on its fifth incarnation. It features in vehicles such as the Skoda Yeti and the latest Range Rover Evoque models. In simple terms, the system calculates how much drive should be directed to the rear wheels; it automatically distributes power between the front and rear wheels, depending on slippage, but normally sends 95 per cent of power to the front wheels.

So if, when asked the million-dollar question: 'What do you want your 4x4 for?' you answer "I want some extra cargo room, a higher vantage point and the ability to drive in the snow during the winter and on muddy grass, for taking the kids to their various outdoor events which may mean parking in a muddy field," then the less traditional Crossover 4x4 could be the choice for you. For many, the beauty of this type of 4x4 is that the on-demand/permanent system means the driver has no decisions to make when the going gets a bit rough; and they are more fuel efficient as on regular, dry, tarmac roads, drive will be directed to only two wheels, (normally those at the

BUYING ADVICE

Your first 4x4



◀ front) until things get a bit rough or you find yourself getting a little too gung-ho on a slippery, tight corner.

This basic form of 4x4 may not, however, be enough for you. Your first 4x4 purchase may be prompted by the need to tow a boat, or horsebox, or trailer, or caravan. You may previously have been relying on a non-4x4 and want to upgrade to a more suitable tow vehicle for bad weather and tight situations - such as muddy fields, or a seaweed-strewn slipway. In that case, a larger SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle, as coined by the Americans way back in the day) is preferable to the more compact Crossover. On-demand four-wheel drive is perfectly suitable in these circumstances, such as that provided by the likes of SsangYong, Nissan and Mitsubishi in their larger SUVs. They don't require any driver input, as the on-demand system will sort out the power distribution as and when needed.

The bigger, more traditional 4x4s, however, quote a 3500kg towing rating and they will feature low range gearing. You need to consider this if you do have heavy towing requirements, such as hauling a boat out of the water on a greasy slipway, or a heavy horsebox that spends much of its time in glutinous mud.

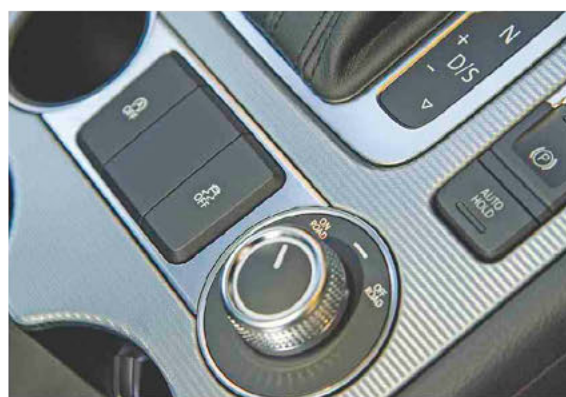
Low range gearing is for those who want to get really tough and enjoy their 4x4 off the road, or perhaps have moved to the wilds where getting to and from home means negotiating difficult terrain or their domain is prone to serious flooding. Of course, many people buy expensive 4x4s with low

range and never even touch the secondary gear lever or push the electronic button that engages it. They are people with plenty of cash who want a prestigious 4x4 to be seen in. That's fine, but if you really need your 4x4 to work for its living, then your options are somewhat more limited.

The pick-up truck market is not only for commercial users. Some still have the traditional secondary gear lever for locking into 4WD high and low and are popular among utility workers and small businesses that need a rugged, capable 4x4 to reach their places of work. Many pick-ups are also bought by families who carry a lot of kit around for leisure purposes. This is increasing in popularity as pick-up trucks have become more comfortable in recent times. Manufacturers realise that drivers want more comfort, even if their truck is not exactly a luxury limo.

Pick-ups have a higher stance and impressive wading depths, as do the more traditional, low range-equipped 4x4s from Land Rover, Jeep, Toyota and Mitsubishi with its Shogun, so are suitable for those who are worried about water levels and deep ruts. Pick-ups can also carry impressive amounts of gear in the back, safely secured with a loadbed truck-top box or sliding cover. The bigger 4x4s also allow for generous cargo carrying and some have seven seats, which may be a major factor if you're looking for a busy family transporter.

If you do intend to go for a more traditional 4x4 with low range gearing it will cost you more, obviously. And this is where it is vital to do some homework



and decent research, especially if buying second-hand. There is plenty of advice to be had from this very magazine in our monthly buyers' guide, which are available as back issues, and there are plenty of companies that specialise in 4x4s, which also advertise in our magazine. Low range means there is access to a lower range of gear ratios which when selected (either by a secondary transfer lever or, more common nowadays, an electronic switch) means you can crawl through tricky terrain, descend steep slippery hills in control and climb equally daunting slopes.

If you're spending a lot of cash on a large, capable 4x4, you want to be getting value for money. If buying second-hand privately or from a dealer then make sure you take more time to look over the vehicle and have a proper test drive. Make sure you ask how much off-roading it has done and check underneath for any signs of excess wear and tear, bumps and knocks and damage caused by any tough action.

It is particularly important to take a look at the sump, gearbox and differential casings. Also make sure that the low-range gearing is working and engages without any hitches. Some older models, such as aging Land Rover Defenders, will probably clunk and grind a bit; but these are notoriously tricky to engage if you haven't learnt the knack (it should be simple and slick when you have got it) so don't write it off if it's not immediately playing ball.

Be prepared for your running costs and consumption to be high on older, traditional, large 4x4s. Some Land Rovers, Jeeps and Toyotas have



Above: The auction house could be the ideal place to get a bargain first 4x4

permanent 4x4, so that will increase your fuel bills, before you even get into the realms of low range.

The low range with sophisticated electronic 4WD system brigade tends to be confined to the large, high priced 4x4s. If you don't have the cash to splash on a big limo, but still desire low-range capability, a three-door Jeep Wrangler may be for you, especially if you like the rugged look and want a cheaper alternative to the mighty Defender and a more basic 4WD system with a good old fashioned transfer lever. But there are even smaller offerings which are still brilliant in the tough stuff such as the excellent Suzuki Jimny - a great little buzz around town as well and a top VFM second-hand buy which just requires the pressing of a button for 4WD high/ low range - and the magnificent Panda Cross, plus there is the brand new Jeep Renegade that has recently hit the dealer forecourts. These little beauties provide you with a highly capable 4x4 at a fraction of the cost if you don't need a big bus to get you around when the weather gets

unpleasant... and they are great fun to drive into the bargain.

There really are loads of options, depending on your 4x4 needs.

DOING THE DEAL

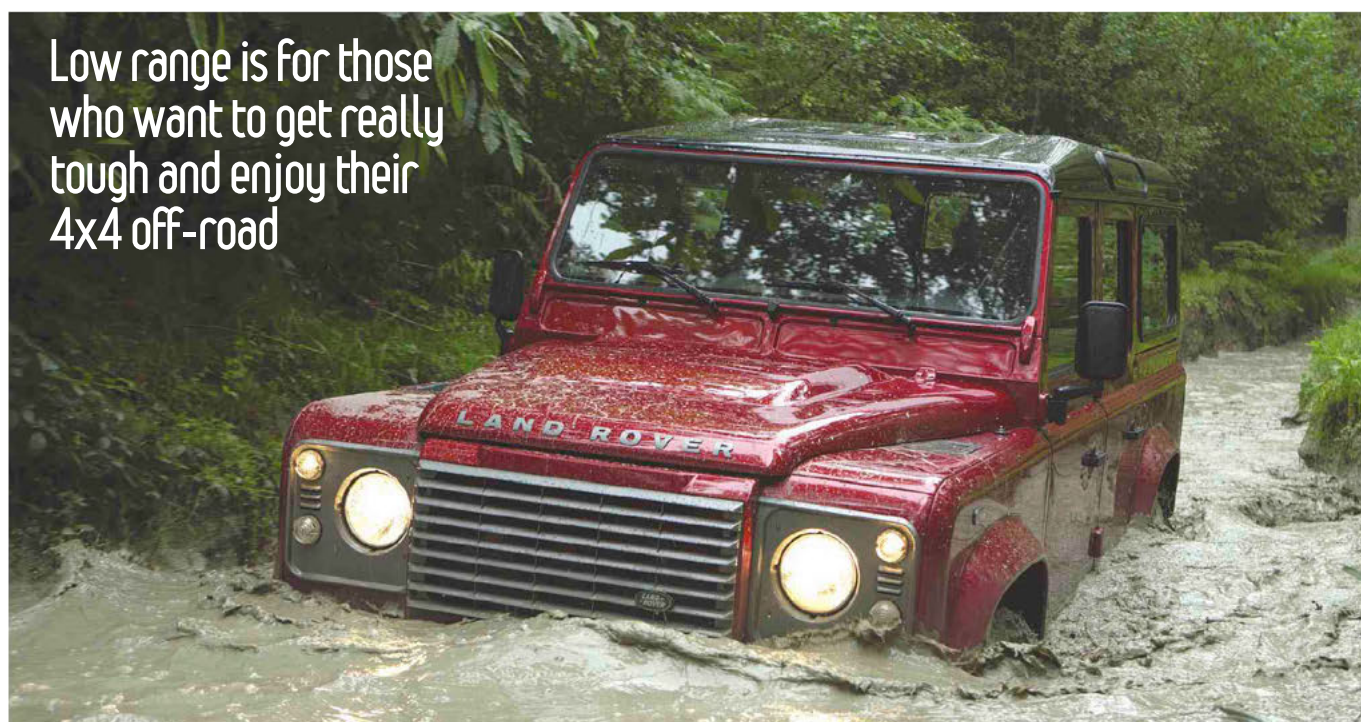
So, you've done your homework and the decision is made. Now it's a case of determining your budget and seeing what is out there within your limitations.

And there is a wide choice, from great second-hand bargains to surprisingly affordable brand new offerings on the 4x4 forecourt. New car sales hit a 10-year high in 2014 and that has a lot to do with how many tempting deals there are out there. It's not just the run-out 4x4 models that are being discounted. You can find all sorts of deals on brand new models as well. It's never been a better time to shop around; car dealers are desperate for your cash, so they are amenable to negotiation.

Time of year can also be a factor in buying your 4x4. It stands to reason that, leading up to the winter months, prices of some 4x4s rise, particularly when the previous year's colder months have seen heavy snow and/or torrential rain and flooding; and we've seen a lot of that over recent years.

With the UK experiencing a blast of icy weather in December, sub-zero temperatures and a large blanket of snow covering the UK, there was a rising demand for 4x4s at the end of 2014.

'Despite the mild autumn, prices rose steadily for 4x4s and, by December and January when the weather worsened with the arrival of snow, values for four-wheel drive vehicles were peaking,' reports Tim Naylor, editor of the BCA



Low range is for those who want to get really tough and enjoy their 4x4 off-road

BUYING ADVICE

Your first 4x4

◀ Used Car Market Report. Since September 2014, the average value of 4x4s at British Car Auctions (BCA) has risen from £13,518 to a peak of £15,438.

The research from BCA shows how much more buyers might pay if they purchase a 4x4 during the period of peak demand. Typically, prices start to rise in October and stay firm until March. Over the past 12 months, 4x4s averaged £14,286 during that period, while from April to September, when the weather is both drier and warmer, a similar basket of vehicles averaged £13,627. This equates to an average premium of £659, if a 4x4 is purchased between October and March.

'Ideally, motorists considering a used 4x4 for their next vehicle should plan ahead and buy in the warmer summer months as they potentially might get a better deal. Always go for the best specification you can afford as this will help it retain value: alloys, leather interior, air con and a good metallic colour are all desirable, while more 'rugged' accessories such as mounted spotlights or running boards can drive prices up, too,' advises Naylor.

The car auction is one way of buying a 4x4. BCA has thousands of vehicles at over 100 auctions a week and you can buy online if attendance is difficult. Interestingly, Bob Cooke has noticed that there are some recent changes in auction 4x4 prices (see *Marketwatch*, page 90); now could be a good time!

There are also the dealers of course, who will enjoy a good barter on the forecourt and have lots of tasty offerings. Then there are the brokers who will do the legwork for you. They can arrange good discounts from dealers, but the drawback is there is no

part-exchange and there could be restrictions on specs, even if they can source the exact model you want. Car supermarkets also stock a wide range of 4x4s with new or nearly new vehicles on sale. Here you can part-exchange your non-4x4 and have the choice of ex-demo 4x4s and pre-reg models. As with brokers, they deal in bulk so good discounts are available; but, again, the downside is that you may have to compromise on specs and colours; what you see on the forecourt is what you get.

When buying a 4x4 we strongly urge you to factor-in the price of a set of winter tyres. Four-wheel drive on its own will help get you through most things, but a decent set of winter rubber will make sure that your passage through is safer and more secure. Many garages/manufacturers offer deals to store your winter/summer tyres as appropriate, including the cost of swapping them over. The time to fit winter tyres is when the average temperature drops to below 7°C; and keep them on until it reaches over that

Below: Make sure you choose the 'off-road' versions; like the Escape option of VW's Touareg, or the version of Skoda's Yeti that has the official Off Road Pack

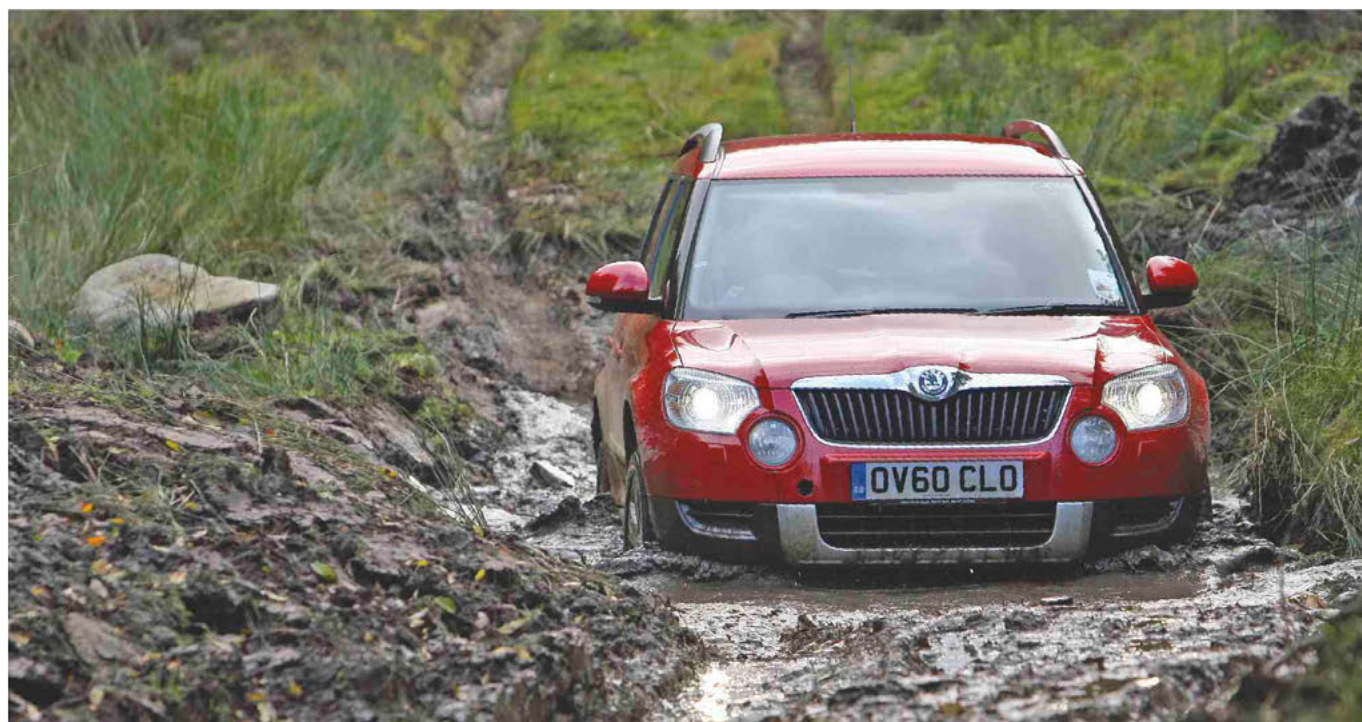
again, so probably November to mid March typically.

If you are planning on doing a lot of off-roading in your new 4x4 all year round, then it might be worth investing in a set of All Terrain (AT) tyres, so that you can drive happily on the road but perform better off it at the weekend – and keep them on in the winter for the snowy roads. Many ATs come with an M&S (Mud & Snow) rating so ideal all year round on and off the road. Standard factory road tyres are not great, even on the most sophisticated 4x4 of them all, the Range Rover, so if you want to have fun with your 4x4 on a regular basis consider carefully your tyre choice.

Once you have decided on your first 4x4 and which tyres are to be fitted, make sure you talk to your insurer and shop around for quotes, as many insurers see 4x4s differently. If there are any mods, for example, they may charge a hefty premium or just refuse to insure; and do tell them if you have winter tyres as that can affect your premium, in a good way. There are plenty of specialists in this magazine who are amenable to 4x4 ownership and therefore offer good deals. We use them, so you should too!

LEARNING HOW TO DRIVE A 4X4

So you have purchased your 4x4, but have never driven one before, other than the test drive; but a 4x4 is a special piece of kit and to get the most out of it you should know how its four-wheel drive system works. Even if you have a standard Crossover, have a go in some slippery mud and see what its capabilities and limitations are. From Crossover to beefed-up traditional, we



The pick-up market is no longer just for commercial users, they are now quality products for all tastes



recommend anyone owning a 4x4 goes on a course at a local off-road centre to learn the tricks of the trade, so that when you do need to drive in difficult circumstances (whether on a snowy road or muddy fields or deep ruts) you know what you are doing and how far your particular 4x4 can go.

Anyone buying a Land Rover should nip along to their local Land Rover Experience centre to learn about their vehicle and drive it in anger. The instructors will tell you exactly how it all works and show you its capabilities – which are vast. There are many off-road training and driving centres all over the country that will cater for whatever your 4x4 is, so make the most of it. We recommend using British Off Road Driving Association (BORDA) and LANTRA-affiliated centres.

So-called 'Pay 'n' Play' days at various sites are a must for the new 4x4

owner. These happen at weekends and are open to anyone with a 4x4. Many routes are graded, so you can take your 4x4 on whichever route is deemed appropriate and you will meet like-minded people who either want to see what their vehicle can do or have loads of fun just for the heck of it. You will find that 4x4 owners are very keen to impart their knowledge and advice to other owners – we are a tight knit, friendly group, so there will be no shortage of help if you need it. See our events listing on page 94. You can also book yourself on an off-roading holiday that suits your type of 4x4 – again these are full of excellent guides only too willing to help and guide you through the ropes. The best advertise in this magazine, so check them out.

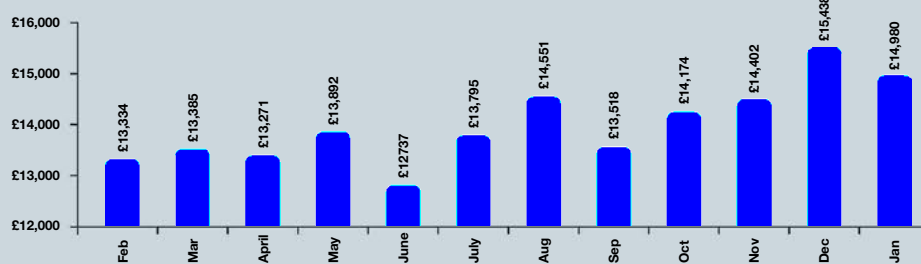
Here at the magazine, the 4x4 team owns a variety of 4x4s to suit different needs and our ramblings in the 'Our

4x4s' section may also help you to decide which type of 4x4 is best for you. We've bought new and second-hand and run long-termers and the conclusion is that 4x4s are really horses for courses; some suit us, some don't. But yes, we'd all probably own top of the range Range Rovers if we had the money...

Reading our columns every month you'll see there is a lot of fun to be had owning a 4x4; it's not just for negotiating difficult road conditions in the winter and carrying loads of stuff around and transporting loads of kids to school; it has a specialist driving system which, when used to its full extent, can provide hours of fun and entertainment as well. So decide what you need from a 4x4, get researching, find the 4x4 that really matches your needs and buy your first 4x4 now. Enjoy – and welcome to the gang! **4x4**

Above: Decide what you want a 4x4 for... as a working vehicle, off-road plaything or a serious tow vehicle

Average 4x4 Used Values – 2014-15 by Month



Useful websites

www.borda.org.uk
www.lantra.co.uk
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*Car covering 15,000 miles per year = saving of £331.00. 4x4 covering 15,000 miles per year = saving of £572.00. HGV covering 50,000 miles per year = saving of £5250.00

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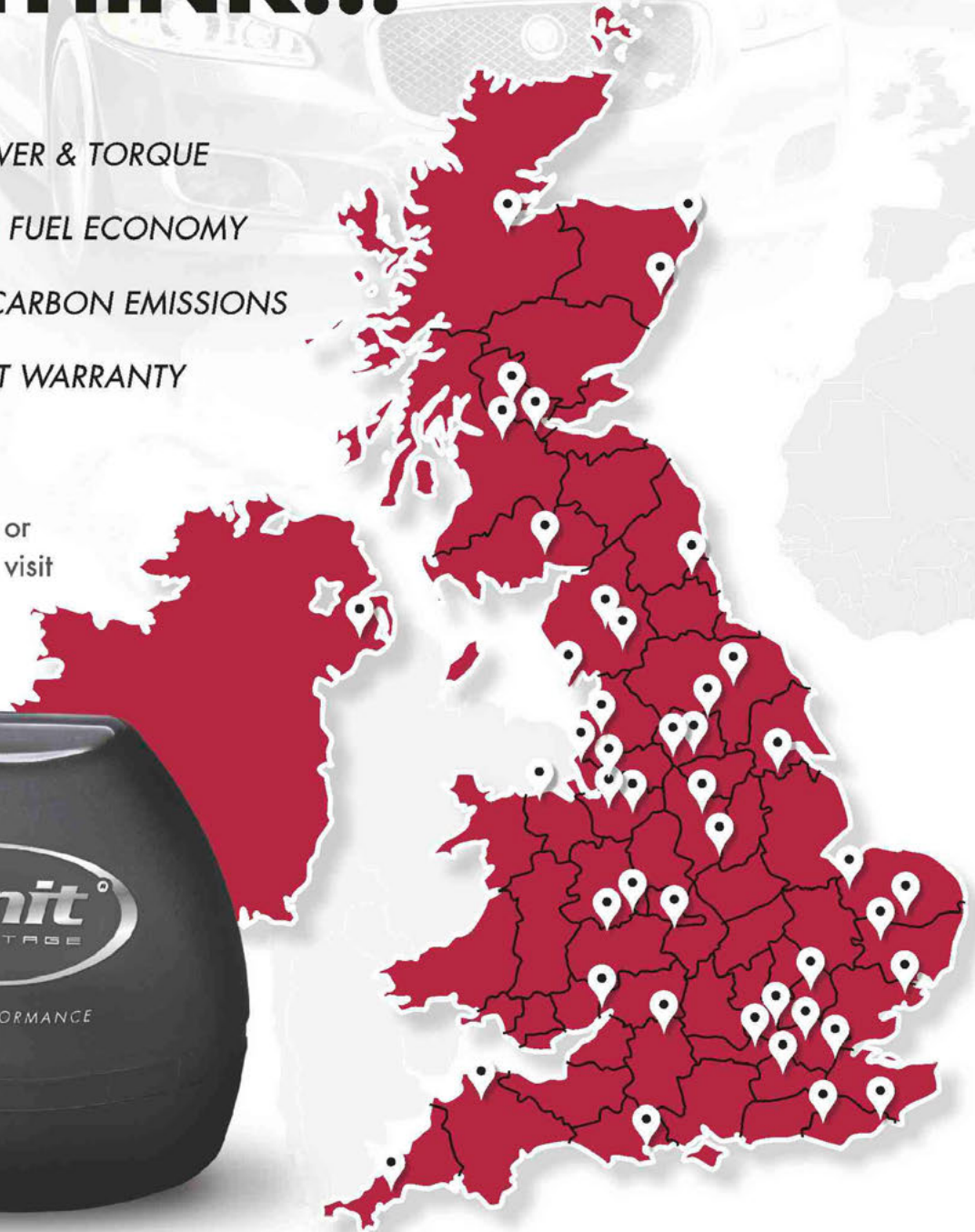
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RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

The Australian bush presents challenges unlike anything we are used to in Europe. It is also proof that - sometimes - when we're looking for one thing, we discover something completely unexpected

Words and photography: Ros Woodham





Main: 'Big Red' presents a really tough challenge for modern and classic vehicles alike

Top: Riding the corrugations at a steady 70kph

Off the beaten track' is an increasingly difficult place to find. It seems we have to travel further afield to experience hidden or unspoilt landscapes, and even then, we often find the disappointing evidence that someone got there before us. When an opportunity arose to cross the Simpson Desert in central Australia, I felt sure I would experience that sense of remoteness I was yearning for.

At 68,000 square miles, the Simpson Desert is the world's largest parallel sand dune desert and contains the world's longest dunes, which range from three to 40 metres in height. This famous red desert was first crossed by a vehicle just 50 years ago when geologist Reg Sprigg drove it in a Nissan Patrol G60. Since then, it has become one of Australia's notorious touring routes earning overlanders serious stripes. Our group, consisting of 11 Pommies and four Aussies, would travel almost 4000 miles commencing in Adelaide, heading north through the Flinders Ranges towards Birdsville. West from there, we would enter the Simpson Desert and its National Park, crossing 1100 dunes through territory that would isolate us from civilisation and communication for seven days. From Dalhousie Springs on the eastern side we would join a section of the famous Oodnadatta Track, skirting Lake Eyre and the eastern fringe of the Flinders to complete the circuit in Adelaide.

We were welcomed by Chris Blakemore of 4x4 prep company FNB 4WD. He would supply several of the vehicles and, with previous experience of 'The Simmo,' was our guide. My own vehicle was a Mazda BT-50 and I was keen to see how its standard set-up would fare in a punishing environment.

Nine strong, our convoy snaked through the Adelaide suburbs into the Clare Valley – some of Australia's most prolific wine-growing regions and the perfect opportunity to stock up on a rewarding camp fire Cab Shiraz. Within hours, the suburban towns and impeccable vineyards had dispersed and we were already 'outback.' The setting sun emphasised the enormity of a cloudless sky but brought with it a chill that none of us had been expecting. Our first camp at Wilpena Pound was a serious wake-up call.

The following morning we took to the dirt tracks through the beautiful Flinders Ranges National Park, saying goodbye to the tarmac for the next few weeks. Emerging from the shaded woodland to vast expanses of gibber and saltbush, families of emus and 'roos glared at us from the roadside.

A corrugated tin sign advertised a local feral menu and we stopped for lunch to sample a choice of kangaroo, camel, goat or emu. Moving on quickly to get away from the swarms of sand flies we cruised along the graded road alongside the Leigh Creek Coal Train that carries thousands of tonnes of coal from the massive open cut mine to the ➤

This sand dune marks the eastern edge of the desert and is the first and largest of around 1100 parallel dunes on our route. It was also a good opportunity to get the feel for driving the soft stuff

ADVENTURE

Simpson Desert



◀ power stations in Adelaide. Its impressive tail of cars disappeared several kilometres into the distance as we waited for it to charge through the level crossing.

Approaching Marree, sections of old rail track and abandoned carriages lie, corrosion-free, at the roadside. The disused sidings separate the main town from the fuel station and shop, which has a sign over the door which simply says 'Bugger.' We approached the tumbledown establishment; a conspicuous group of pale-skinned Poms making involuntary anti-fly gestures. A local woman recommended a pungent, waxy tea tree repellent. It made absolutely no difference to the

swarms that attract like magnets to your face, but we did smell quite nice. Sundown is the only relief, magically switching off the magnetism, making the flies vanish into thin air.

Marree marks the start of the iconic Birdsville Track. In 1880, E.A. Burt pioneered this stock route to drive cattle from Queensland to the markets of Adelaide. In 1884, the railway arrived and the town became a major supply point for northerly townships. In the 1930s vehicles replaced the Afghan Cameleers and outback legend, Tom Kruse, began his fortnightly return journey delivering mail and supplies to isolated communities. The original mail truck is on display outside the Marree



Top: The Oodnadatta Track follows the old Ghan railway line

Above: This outback restaurant advertises a feral menu...

Left: Perished kangaroo is a reminder that this is a harsh environment

Hotel and the walls inside are plastered with old photos and newspaper cuttings describing the life of this remarkable man. 'To know the history of the people of the 500-kilometre track between Marree in South Australia and Birdsville in Queensland is to understand what it means to be Australian' - The Mailmen Back of Beyond.

A course wasteland scowled at us from either side of the graded track that disappeared into a heat haze on the featureless horizon. Nine dust plumes stretched out over several kilometres, rocketing out from behind each truck to be ushered aside by a gentle, but welcome cross-breeze. At the wheel, I

settled the Mazda at an optimum speed to comfortably ride the corrugations and clear of the dust of the vehicle in front. We fuelled up at Mungerannie Station, aware of the increasing fuel prices as we penetrated the outback. A moonless sky crowded with stars - and the occasional shooter - rewarded a long driving day and we camped among the sand dunes.

The Birdsville Inside Track has been closed in recent years due to flooding - hard to believe in such an arid environment. It marks the original dry-weather stock route and traverses the treacherous Diamantina flood plains. Deep tyre ruts are evidence of a recent vehicle's struggle. Thankfully, the surface had dried and we enjoyed a smooth ride over soft, sandy tracks.

The legendary Birdsville Hotel was a welcome sight in the intensifying heat. The beer was cold and the bar was quiet, but the township was just recovering from hosting the famous Birdsville Races, an event held annually since 1882, when the population swells from 100 to 6000. We camped by the billabong beneath the raucous, roosting Galahs. Final checks and provisions were in order as we prepared for the next leg. Birdsville is the eastern gateway to the Simpson Desert and our last taste of civilisation for the next week.

We headed west along a well-graded track towards 'Big Red.' At 40 metres in height, this sand dune marks the eastern edge of the desert and is the first and largest of around 1100 parallel dunes on our route. It was also a good opportunity to get the feel for driving the soft stuff. We aired down to around 16-18psi increasing the tyres' footprints and helping the vehicle to work over the sand rather than cutting into it. Initial going was slow - and winching frequent - while we got used to our vehicles' reactions to the terrain, but I was instantly impressed with how well the Mazda performed despite the standard front suspension being rather soft.

Sand flags are an obligatory accessory, a warning for on-coming traffic on the other side of a dune. Desert code also requires the lead vehicle to monitor channel 10 on the CB, listening out for other convoys and making regular announcements of their route and position; passing is not straightforward on the single desert track. I struggled to hide my disappointment at the amount of traffic here. As part of a large group passing several other convoys daily, the desert did not give me the sense of remoteness I had hoped for. However, the experience of being in this exceptional red landscape did exceed



We had been warned and were armed with sprays, creams and nets, but we were not prepared to do battle against savages that feast on your skin like locusts and can penetrate clothing with their vicious bite



my expectations.

The desert is accessed by a limited network of tracks. We followed the QAA Line to Poeppel's Corner. This is probably the best known of the state corners - and certainly the most remote. It marks the junction between the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia. The tracks here have become deeply corrugated over time, which tested every inch of our vehicles, pounding the suspension and straining the running gear. It proved too much for two of our convoy; a failed suspension set-up on the LJ 70 Series Land Cruiser and cracked engine mounts on the Ford Maverick left us no choice but to camp up while the injured party limped back to Birdsville in the hopes that the roadhouse had the means and resources to fix these crucial issues. Incommunicado, we waited.

At this time of year - early October - the desert puts on an incredible, colourful display of wild flowers, grasses, shrubs and the reddest sand we had seen. Newer sand in the desert is paler, gradually becoming brick red with age as the entrapped clay particles weather. We camped in a small area teeming with life. Insects, lizards, birds and all manner of flora enriched this part of the desert. We were even visited by an Inland Taipan snake, which slithered through the middle of our camp as if to remind us that amongst this beauty lies a penalty for those

Above clockwise:
Fallen gum tree
branches feed the
camp fire; 'Phoning
Home' via satellite;
'The Beardy Man' at
Mungerannie Station
threatens to cut off
pony-tails with a six-
inch blade

Left: Claypans
and parallel dunes
characterise the
Simpson Desert

ADVENTURE

Simpson Desert



◀ careless enough not to respect it. This aggressive species has the potential to kill a human in 30 minutes. That night I felt a little uneasy as I zipped myself securely into my swag and listened to the dingos that scavenged around the camp.

A day later, our missing members returned with successful repairs and we pressed on. The start of the French Line is characterised by salt lakes fringed by Gidgee trees and crowded by long, red dunes. The Knolls Track then runs north-south, parallel with the dunes, and allowed us to make up some time. The Knolls are an important landmark. Rare and fragile gypsum outcrops, they were once themselves dunes that hardened into their present, fragile form. They are of particular scientific interest and strong Aboriginal significance. Some 40km further along, the Rig Road joins up with the Erabena Track and leads to the Lone Gum Tree - a mature Box Eucalypt thriving alone in unlikely conditions.

Smaller dunes indicated the culmination of our desert crossing and I felt a pang of sadness. However, we were not out of danger yet. Several vehicles were critically low on fuel and had to suck fumes as far as Mount Dare to refill. Horrendous corrugations pounded our grey matter and challenged every nut and bolt on the trucks. Rising temperatures added insult to increasing injury and it was hardly surprising that the first glimpse of a creek drew us in like zombies,

Top: A rare bit of perspective overlooking the Birdsville Track and vast open space

Above right: Even the tinniest amount of wheelspin will dig your vehicle down into the sand. Having friends with winches will get you out

Right: Camels were imported into Australia from Arabia, India and Afghanistan during the 19th century



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110 7 Seater 48 Heritage Edition £39,995

90 4 Seater 48 Heritage Edition £35,995

ADVENTURE

Simpson Desert



◀ flopping into the salty water, fully clothed. We rested a while, clothes crystallising, listening to the sound of boiling coolant.

From beneath the Simpson Desert the natural waters of the Great Artesian Basin filter to the surface forming mounds, bubbling ponds and, as is the case at Dalhousie Springs, steaming spas. A dip in the massive, 37degC bath was most welcome but the barrage of mosquitoes was not. We had been warned of their vast numbers here and were armed with sprays, creams and nets, but we were not prepared to do battle against savages that feast on your skin like locusts and can penetrate clothing with their vicious bite. In a panic we fled, vowing never to speak ill of a sand fly again.

The return leg of the journey offered more iconic and historical landmarks

such as the famous Pink Roadhouse at Oodnadatta and the ruins and remains of railways and homesteads telling fascinating tales of mining and farming communities since the colonisation of Australia. Further down the Oodnadatta Track we passed Anna Creek Station, which at six million acres is the largest cattle station in the world and a legacy of Sidney Kidman, the cattle king and pastoral entrepreneur who, in the late 1800s, bought vast tracts of land throughout Australia.

Our final camp was at Warraweena where weeks of flat horizons and dusty tracks relaxed into rocky forest tracks and a sensational climb to the summit of Mount Gill. The 360-degree panorama of the surrounding area includes Wilpena Pound and Lake Torrens over 40 miles away. We returned to the forested valley floor and



enjoyed a warm evening cooking damper in the coals of the fire.

High winds and threatening storm clouds chased us out of camp early the following morning. We fled the valley hastily, where tracks turn to bitumen just in time for the rain and a comfortable drive back to Adelaide. It was a dramatic climax to an eventful trip packed with new challenges and rich experiences. The desert, which I had expected to be bleak and relentless had been teeming with life, colour and variety. Since returning home to Ireland - which feels like another planet in comparison - I have developed a real appreciation and respect for the brutal landscapes and unfathomable spaces where Aboriginal people have survived for centuries.

Although I did not experience the solitude I had expected, upon reflection, this renewed scope has been even more rewarding. **4x4**

Top: Tempting though it may be, it is forbidden to collect fire wood within the Simpson Desert National Park

Above: Author Ros accessorises with two icons: the Birdsville Hotel and 'Betsy' an HJ47 Toyota Land Cruiser

Left: The team on top of Big Red on the eastern edge of the Simpson Desert





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FIRST AMONG EQUALS

With the very latest Vitara now arriving in the UK, it seemed a good time to review the impact of a vehicle that can be justifiably thought of as the very first European SUV. If you think there are too many mid-range SUVs on the road, well, it's all Suzuki's fault!

Words: Nigel Fryatt

"Styled to new adventures for new lifestyles" was how Suzuki proudly described the Vitara when introduced in 1988. Now the fact that sharp suited marketing managers and 'global brand' directors still drag up similar fatuous slogans when launching new SUVs in 2015, only underlines just how far ahead of the game Suzuki was back in 1988. Even the name is clever, artificially constructed to imply 'lifestyle, youth and vitality'; it was actually produced by a British trademark company for the European market. Back home in Japan, Suzuki's new four-wheel drive was christened Escudo and this was, apparently, to represent "The Evolution of Design Excellence". OK, so many of us may find this marketing tosh somewhat grating, but

remember, Suzuki got there first. Before the Vitara there were simply no 'lifestyle' SUVs.

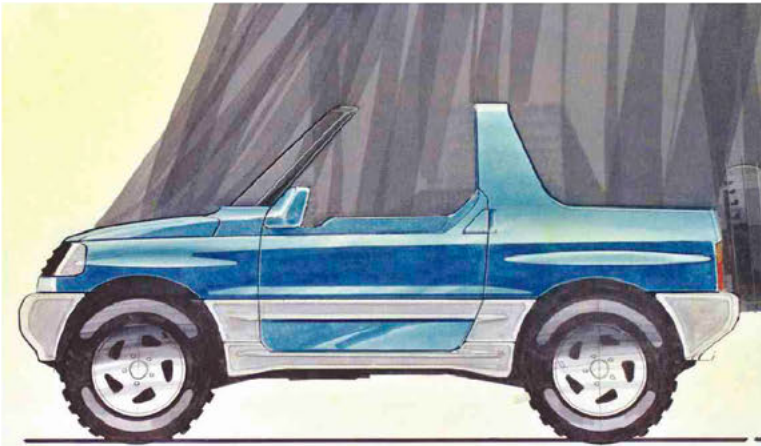
The Suzuki Vitara JLX short wheelbase (three door) was listed in this magazine back in 1989 as available for £9000. At the same time you could get a Dacia Duster GLX three door for £6500, and a Lada Niva Cossack for £7345, but build quality – or rather lack of it – poor reliability and reputation meant these were not competitors. Suzuki was still selling SJ410s and Santanas at the time, don't forget. If you wanted a Land Rover Ninety, the base vehicle started at £14,467, while a Range Rover Vogue was £27,350. There was quite simply nothing in the market like this, at this price, from a respected four-wheel drive manufacturer.



Below: One of the very first promotional shots of the European Suzuki Vitara. Still looking pretty good to us...

The UK was chosen by Suzuki Japan to be the launch country for the new Vitara, and some 200 journalists turned up in Edinburgh, Scotland to drive the first 70 Vitaras in Europe. Suzuki GB Cars was actually a division of the





1988 AND ALL THAT

To put things into perspective, in 1988: A pint of beer cost 87p; Liverpool won the First Division and Chelsea were relegated; Ayrton Senna won his first F1 World Championship; Ben Johnson won the 100m in the Olympics (with a little help from certain substances); and the Peugeot 405 (above) was European Car of the Year. Looking back, it wasn't a great time for mainstream cars. The top ten best sellers included four Fords and three Vauxhalls, with the Metro the fourth best selling vehicle in the UK! Kylie Minogue was bouncing around chanting '*I should be so lucky*' and to keep everyone being positive we were all listening to '*Don't worry, be happy*' by Bobby McFerrin. Sadly, the great Enzo Ferrari passed away, and can you guess what was the best selling car accessory of the year? Garfield the cat.

Above left: These design studies of Vitara developments were drawn back in the early 1990s. One is clearly a forerunner to Suzuki's X/90... not a vehicle as successful as the Vitara!



Right: Apologies for the quality of this picture as the original couldn't be found, but looking carefully you will see that the original design prototype of the Vitara is actually built from layering wood! Computer? Phah!

Left: The design of the Vitara was labour intensive, no high tech computers and virtual reality caves here. This is a pre-production wooden mule being tweaked 'by eye' in Japan

Heron Corporation and so this launch was a big deal. Suzuki's President, Mr Osamu Suzuki, was in attendance, keen to hear what the journalists thought. The test route included on-road miles, motorways, Scottish greenlanes and a special off-road course in a 'bing' – a former open cast mine. This in itself was new for international car launches, in that Suzuki wanted to show that this was a vehicle that could be driven seriously both on, and off, the road. For some hardened newspaper hacks, this was the first time they had ever driven off-road and they were doing it in a fancy looking vehicle, with big wheel arches, sitting high and bouncing about universally being impressed, if somewhat confused. What was this vehicle?

NOSTALGIA

Suzuki Vitara

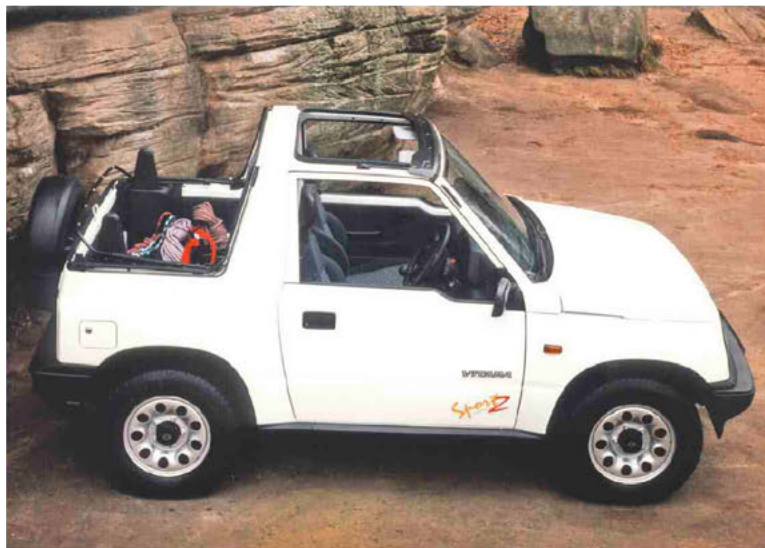


◀ While the new design of the Vitara was a significant change from everything else on the road, it wasn't just an interesting shape. Underneath there was a tough, three section, ladder frame chassis. To select four-wheel drive you had to physically move a lever on the two speed transfer 'box' - no electronic wizardry here - remembering first that if you had manual free-wheeling hubs, you needed to get out and twist to the 'Lock' position otherwise the 4WD system would simply turn the driveshafts, not the wheels!

Besides the chassis, and selectable low range transmission, Suzuki also surprised with the Vitara's suspension set-up. Fully independent at the front, with MacPherson struts and coil springs, the rear axle was located by coil springs and trailing lower links. This allowed for good wheel articulation, useful as there was only eight inches of ground clearance, but this was linked with approach and departure angles of 40 and 41deg, front and rear - which we described in this magazine at the time, as 'respectable'. Damning with faint praise, with hindsight, perhaps.

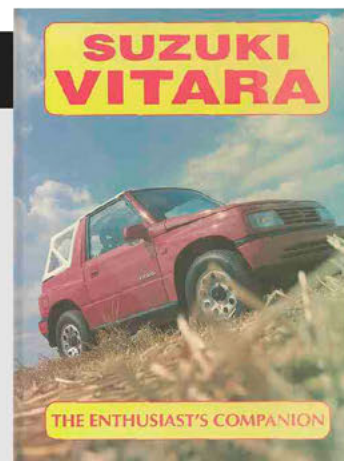
Power for the Vitara was a then new 1.6-litre engine, which arrived in both carburettor and injected formats. It initially produced a modest 74bhp at a rather buzzy 5250rpm and only 90lb ft of torque. The result was a towing figure of 1100kg. To put that in perspective, the Fiat Panda 4x4 of that era claimed a towing figure of 900kg. A quick engine upgrade within a year of launch did

When launched, the Suzuki Vitara was available as a three door 'metal top' or as a soft top. In many ways, it was the open version that firmly cemented the Vitara's 'fun, lifestyle' character



ANCIENT AND MODERN

When researching for this feature, a colleague mentioned that the book I wrote in 1995, *Suzuki Vitara: The Enthusiasts Companion*, was actually still available on Amazon. Intrigued I checked and was pleased to see that it had two five star reviews. Pride then got the better of me and I couldn't resist checking to see what was thought of my literary talents. Someone called Crystal wrote: "This book is of the good old vintage type. The pages contained the sort of information you would expect a book of this type to have." Vintage!? Whether the reviewer was referring to the vehicle or the author was not clear, but it does, perhaps, show the original Suzuki Vitara is now entering 'classic' status.



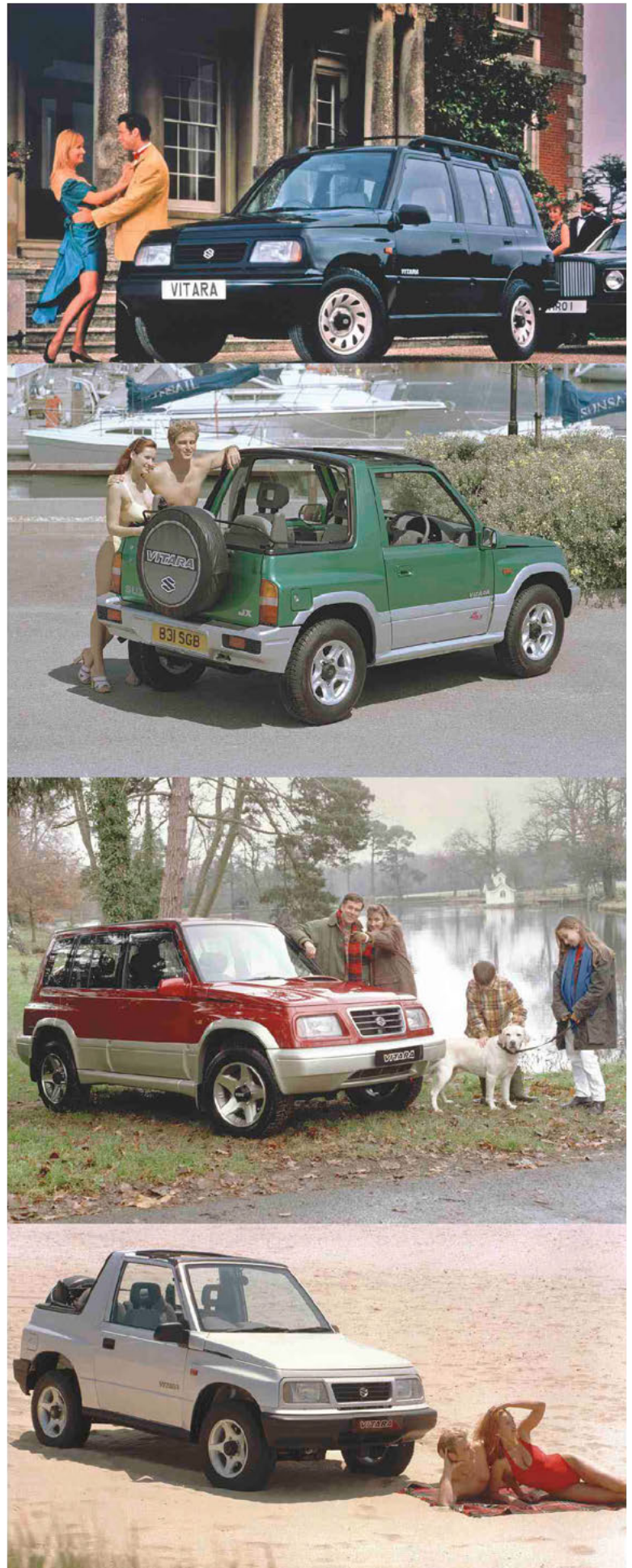
improve matters, but it was perhaps a modest start and we commented that it would benefit from some additional sound deadening for the engine compartment, especially when travelling at motorway speeds.

The Vitara was also sent to the US, where it again proved to be somewhat ahead of the game. General Motors had a shareholding in the Japanese company, which led to the first Vitara in America to be initially marketed as the Geo Tracker. Intriguingly, for America there was actually a two-wheel drive version of the Tracker. Given that having two-wheel drive versions of modern day SUVs is a fairly recent phenomenon (Land Rover introducing this with the Evoque, and continuing with the new Discovery Sport) for the Vitara to have such a version in the very early 1990s can be seen as another first.

Yet when we concluded our report on that first test drive in Scotland (December 1988), like many test reports at the time, we were obviously a little underwhelmed, reporting: "Visually the Vitara might not be everyone's bottle of brown ale and it seems the poseur who might have been quite happy with an SJ in standard trim is going to look long and hard at the bolt-on yuppie accessories designed to macho-ise the Vitara and think Hmmmmm... The Japanese told us that they expected families to go for the car as their main vehicle, stressing good value for money, with added recreational scope and safety from four-wheel drive." How right they were. A total of 2.87 million Vitaras were built, and some 40 per cent of those were sold in Europe.

While Land Rover and Jeep can justifiably claim some major developments in the world of four-wheel drive, it is perhaps too easy to forget the influence of the Vitara. OK, so Suzuki is not making the glamorous technological 4x4 marvels that seem to roll from the Jaguar Land Rover production line every other month. It doesn't produce a tough working pick-up to match the ubiquity of Toyota's Hilux, and it doesn't have the kudos, enduring character and four-wheel drive heritage of Jeep's Wrangler. However, it can claim to have been the first manufacturer to produce a European family SUV, that spends most of its time firmly on the tarmac, but has off-road credentials. SUV sales and marketing departments of many motoring manufacturers will still persuade you that their latest vehicle matches your 'adventurous, outdoor, sporting lifestyle'. To help you understand better, the vehicles will be given tough, go-anywhere names and special paint jobs. It's worth remembering that the Vitara's been there, and done that for nearly three decades. We salute the first modern SUV ever produced. Viva Vitara! **4x4**

Right: These period promotional photographs were shot to emphasise the 'lifestyle' aspects of the Suzuki Vitara. In a way, it's the actual subject matter in the photographs and their context that dates the picture and not the vehicle itself...





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NOSTALGIA
1992 Suzuki Vitara



IN THE BEGINNING...

Suzuki produced the Vitara, the first 'lifestyle' SUV, a model that was to start a global trend. We went to Germany to drive a totally original 1992 Vitara JLX. And it was something of a surprise

Words and photography: Nigel Fryatt

There was the tiniest little shriek of protest from the fan belt as we switched on the ignition. But that 'old engine' signature was but a brief distraction. Surely, even a fully restored 23-year old vehicle shouldn't feel this good. But that was the point; it hadn't been restored, it was 100 per cent original, both mechanically and, as we drove further, also in its character and soul.

It is important to backtrack a little, to explain just why we were driving a 1992 Suzuki Vitara JLX three-door around the picturesque German countryside outside Bensheim, near Frankfurt. Bensheim is actually the headquarters of Suzuki Europe and that is where we

had tracked down the Vitara. It had come to our attention some months ago, and the launch of the very latest Vitara (see page 54) seemed a good excuse to do a Nostalgia feature. We had briefly seen the vehicle and thought the 'restoration' looked particularly faithful to the original. There would surely be some great photographs of the Vitara stripped back to its bare ladder frame chassis, showing where all the rust was being removed. There would be good anecdotes of where all the replacement parts were sourced; did Suzuki still have them in stock, or were they sourced through enthusiastic club members, or even bought via eBay? Then there would be stories

about how the engine and transmission had been rebuilt, lots of new parts fitted obviously. After all, a vehicle that is now 23-years old was probably falling apart when Suzuki acquired it. How wrong we were...

The full story came with a smile and a firm handshake from Dirk Frischknecht, Manager Field Staff and Special Sales of Suzuki Europe. It's the 'special sales' part of Dirk's title that explains what he does, as he is responsible for Suzuki's growing heritage fleet, an indication that the company is taking its history very seriously. Dirk's smile remained as he said that the Vitara was 100 per cent original: "It's all original. It's not been repainted, nothing like that. There is a ►

NOSTALGIA

1992 Suzuki Vitara

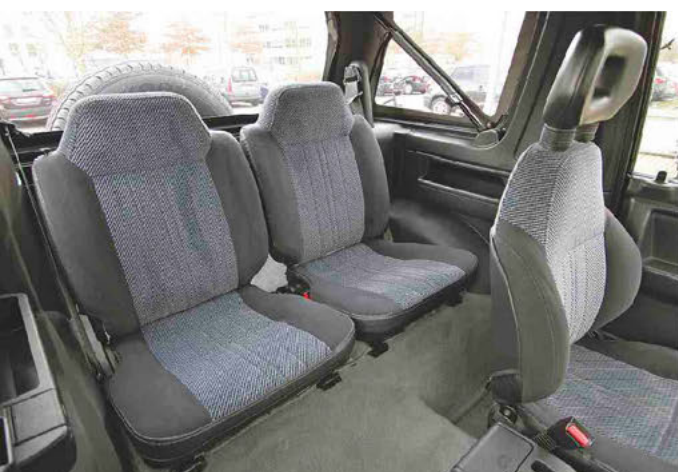


◀ small area of rust under the driver's seat and we haven't even bothered to repair that yet. Oh, and we have painted the front bumper, but it's all original. I couldn't believe it when I saw it. I just had to have it."

This Vitara came to Dirk's attention because of the 2009 scrapage scheme in Germany. Similar to the UK, the scheme was created to artificially increase new car sales. In Germany, it was the law that vehicles over a certain age actually had to be scrapped and this Vitara arrived at a Suzuki dealership, with the owner trading it in for a new Swift. Amazingly the Vitara had been a demo car, then sold and only had three owners – two of which were in the same family. When we

Above: Family fortunes: The 1992 Vitara with its brand new 2015 cousin outside Suzuki Europe's German HQ at Bensheim

Below: It's a squeeze getting in the back of the three-door Vitara. Note the individual seats, it's only a four seater, for sure



drove it, the odometer registered just over 46,000kms and they are genuine kms – it's now too precious to be worked too hard, so our drive was particularly special.

It is actually a Canadian-built Vitara. At the time, they were produced in Canada, Spain and Japan. Dirk explained that this does give the vehicle an advantage, since North American built Vitaras were coated with quality underbody protection, which has obviously inhibited the rust problem. According to Dirk, Japanese models were nearly as good, but that Spanish ones were... well, not quite so well produced!

The Vitara doesn't have any

aftermarket accessories so as Dirk explained, it doesn't "have holes drilled all over it!" It was the J1X model complete with what at the time was called the 'Power Pack', which meant power steering and electric windows. Plus we would think, the electrically adjustable wing mirrors, which certainly surprised me when I tried to adjust them; remember this was an inexpensive vehicle back in 1992, so electric windows and wing mirrors must have been quite the thing.

But it wasn't actually the visual condition or mechanical history that really surprised, it was the way it drove. There's no denying that getting behind the wheel of an 'old' car, and a heritage



museum display vehicle at that, is a little daunting. Behind the wheel it feels a little different to today's SUVs, with a very upright driving position and seemingly big, simple, button-free steering wheel. For some reason I actually looked down at the pedals before the off, and my how small they seem to the great rubber plates we have today; they are quite delicate as well, super light. As we mentioned, the fan belt slipped just a fraction on the very first turn of the ignition, but not again throughout the whole drive. The electronic ignition immediately held the engine at around 2000rpm to warm, but quickly dropped to under 1000rpm where it ticked over so quietly, I almost laughed out loud. Mirrors adjusted, seat back raked slightly we were off into the German traffic buzzing around the industrial estate where Suzuki Europe has its HQ. Massive juggernauts, and

impatient Mercedes-Benz drivers (a prerequisite for ownership perhaps) meant that no quarter would be given to the little Vitara. Until we got to the quieter country roads, it was going to be a battle getting on to and off the speed limit-free *autobahn*; the far left lane best left for those Mercedes-Benz drivers battling it out with equally impatient Audi saloons. What was great, however, was just how together the Vitara felt. Times have changed, SUVs have developed, gained weight, accessories, comfort, more powerful engines and way more technology, but do you know what? It doesn't matter to this Vitara, it felt as good today as it did back in the 1990s, and what's more it was considerably more fun to actually drive than scores of the latest SUVs I have tested over the last few years.

It felt light and easy to drive, delicate in some ways, perhaps even fragile but

Above left: The Vitara's interior dates it somewhat; big flat, basic steering wheel and check out those pedals... and fag end I didn't notice when photographing! It's not mine, either

Top right: Centre console, complete with Blaupunkt stereo cassette player! Note tiny transfer box lever

Times have changed, SUVs have developed, gained weight, more powerful engines and way more technology, but do you know what? It doesn't matter to this Vitara

the 1.6-litre injected engine still pulled smoothly and wanted to accelerate up to the 5000rpm mark. In some of the sweeping country roads the Vitara does lean more than a modern day SUV, but it's not dramatic and the ride and handling offer comfortable and confident progress. The further we drove, the more fun it became.

We didn't take the Vitara off-road, seemingly inappropriate for a museum display vehicle! It was, nevertheless, comforting to look down and see that dinky transfer box lever that could take you from 2H, up to 4H and then to 4L. Perhaps it's a shame that the vehicle has probably never been mud-plugging, but perhaps it's not so important now it has entered its retirement.

What is much more important is Suzuki's commitment to building a heritage vehicle fleet, and to supporting people owning 'old' models. And much of this is the drive from Dirk Frischknecht whose enthusiasm for retro vehicles knows no limits. Close to Suzuki Europe's HQ is a local dealer where the heritage fleet is housed. The highlight has to be Dirk's absolutely gorgeous LJ80 Suzuki 'jeep'. This vehicle has been restored and it is perhaps surprising to learn that the 'duck egg blue' colour scheme is actually an original colour, while it looks particularly modern. Alongside it is another of Dirk's 'originals', a special edition Samurai, complete with stick-on giraffe panels on the doors – this is not vinyl wrapping, back then it was more like wallpaper!

Although not a 4x4, we had to smile at the Suzuki Alto in the collection. Ridiculously tiny, it looks like a big Matchbox toy. How we ever used to ➤



NOSTALGIA

1992 Suzuki Vitara



◀ drive such things is a mystery; you'd probably be able to park four on the footprint of a 2015 Range Rover!

As you read this, Suzuki's heritage collection will have been on display at Retro Classic, claimed to be Europe's greatest classic car exhibition, which was in Stuttgart at the end of March. For the first time, Suzuki will have had a display exhibiting the LJ80, an early Suzuki Swift GTi and an X/90 – surely the oddest, and daftest, small 4x4 any manufacturer has ever produced, but one that has a strong following in Germany. The model Dirk has found is yet again an original, although to this writer, that doesn't make it any less odd!

For owners of older Suzukis, these developments bode well as April sees

the establishment of the very first Suzuki heritage dealer, a place where owners of older cars will be able to source parts and perhaps more importantly speak to experts who have hands-on experience of older models. Dirk is planning for there to be five such specialists across Germany.

But for us, it has to be all about the 1992 Suzuki Vitara JLX. As regular readers will no doubt recognise, I am lucky enough to drive a lot of the very latest 4x4 SUVs on the market. In doing so, it is all too easy to get submerged in the fascinating comfort, technology and abilities of models, some of which can cost up to and above £100,000. Being behind the wheel, at speed, of a Range Rover Sport can be a great place to be.

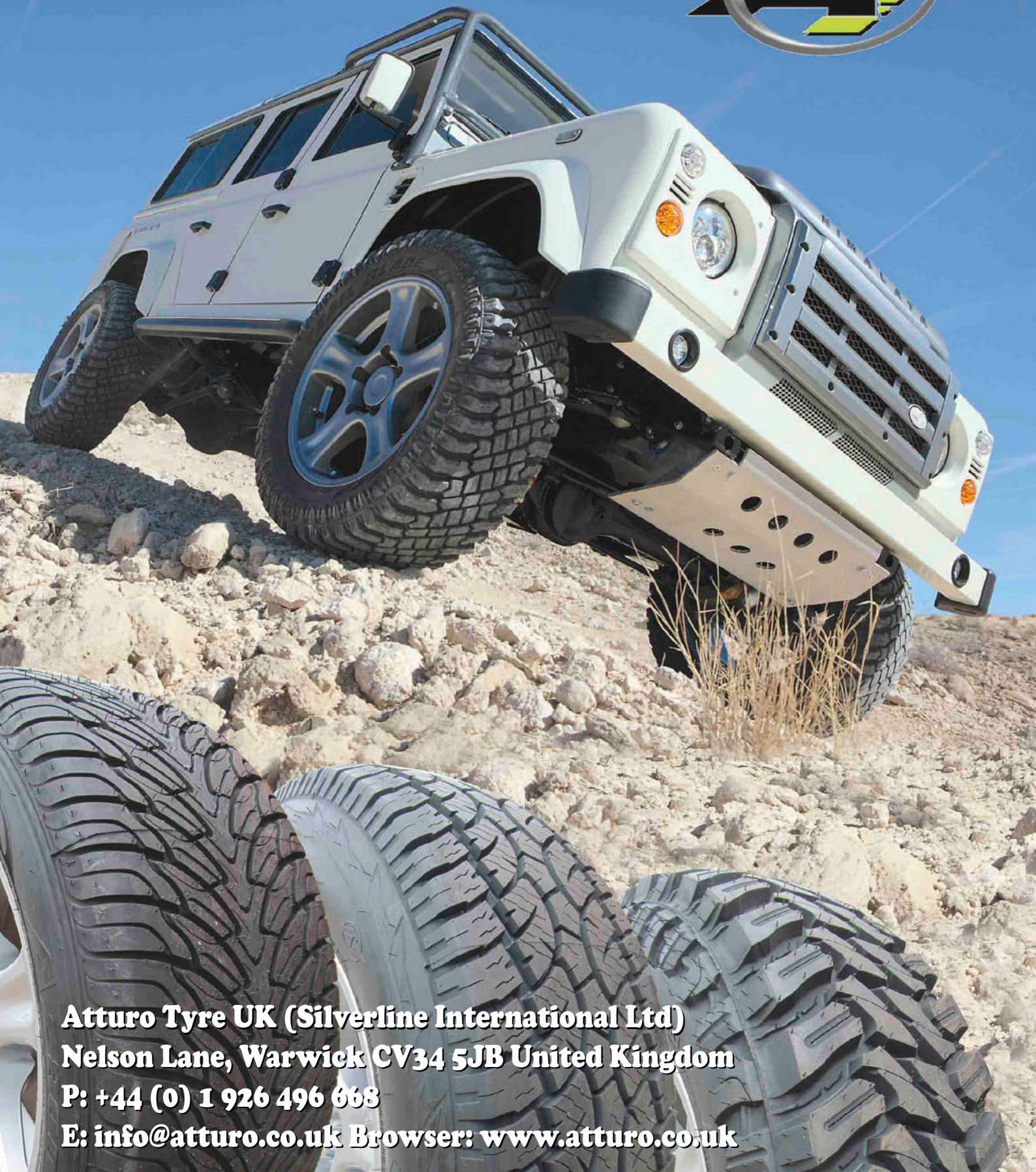
Effortlessly climbing a rock strewn and rutted hill in the latest Jeep Wrangler on new BFGoodrich KO2 rubber is highly satisfying. That you can also listen to your favourite radio station on the latest multi-speakered, sub-woofered, graphically-equalized DAB digital radio is also a treat for any music lover. However, my only disappointment was that I forgot to take any of my old C90 cassette tapes to Germany to slot into the – original, of course – Blaupunkt stereo fitted to the Vitara. Apart from that minor oversight on my behalf, bumbling around the German countryside in a 1992 Vitara has to be up there with one of the best drives this writer has experienced in many a year. Doing so, puts you firmly into the very heart of what made this vehicle such a success, and such a trendsetter. It still felt as fresh and fun as when it was launched, and there are quite a few modern SUV manufacturers of highly successful 4x4s that could learn a lot from this Vitara.

While Suzuki started this SUV trend back in the late 1980s, drive some of the latest bland, sanitised products to come from Japan and you can actually feel where the computer has taken over from any enthusiastic, human, design engineer. And these are not the mutterings of a grumpy old man bemoaning that, 'they just don't make them like they used to', it's the celebration that one company has rescued such an original, and my appreciation of the fun I had in getting behind the wheel. Viva Vitara! **4x4**



Suzuki's heritage collection includes a magnificent LJ80 and the special edition Samurai – complete with giraffe side 'wallpaper'!

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SELLING THE VITARA

During its long career in the UK, the Vitara was marketed as the ultimate in trendy 'lifestyle' 4x4s. Paul Guinness looks back at some of the ads and brochures of the time

TRENDY TWOSOME

In both hard- and soft-top guises, the short-wheelbase version of the Vitara was a 4x4 for the fashion-conscious buyer – as well as the perfect vehicle for anyone who'd previously bought an SJ but now craved something a tad larger and better-handling. So it comes as no surprise to discover these two period press shots showing the Vitara in a couple of 'lifestyle' situations from the '90s.

The soft-top is parked next to a marina, with a plethora of expensive looking yachts as the backdrop; but to emphasise the fun aspect of the car, a good looking young couple gaze at the Vitara, her clad in a skimpy swimsuit and him sporting an unfeasibly tight pair of swimming shorts. This, apparently, was what we all aspired to at the time.

As for the hard-top version, that was parked outside a Chiquito restaurant, with the same couple – albeit now fully clothed and looking rather smarter – presumably heading out to dinner. Which is, of course, exactly what we were all doing in the '90s.

THE FAMILY VITARA

Issue one of the 'Suzuki Range' publication was published in 1995, featuring the latest five-door long-wheelbase Vitara on the front cover: "Make a powerful statement with the five-door Vitara Estate" suggested the brochure copywriters, who insisted that after just a test drive in this latest version you'd "appreciate the unique strength of character". This was still a Vitara, and still a fun choice; but with extra doors and extra space on board, there was finally a Vitara for folk with families.



THE COMPACT V6

Once Suzuki had expanded the five-door Vitara range to include the new 2.0-litre V6 and the 2.0-litre diesel, the appeal of this family favourite was greater than ever. But it was the V6 version that was particularly interesting, for this was the smallest vee-configured powerplant on offer in any 4x4 or SUV at the time.

With 135bhp on tap, the Vitara V6 was apparently as "smooth as silk yet strong as an ox", offering what Suzuki described as "plenty of mid-range torque and exceptional cruising ability".



THE 4X4 4U?

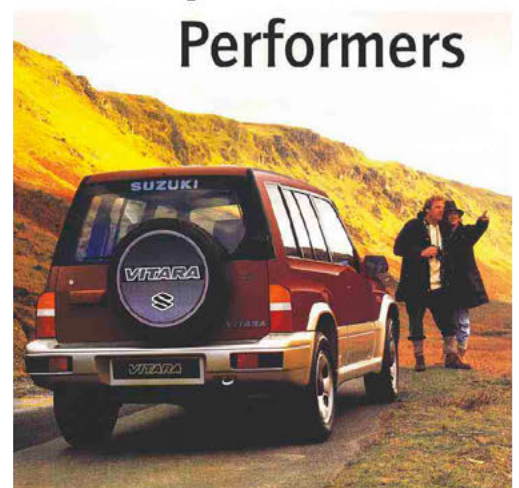
There was no shortage of special-edition Vitaras offered over the years, one of the most popular arriving late on in its career: the Vitara 4U, with both hard- and soft-top versions available. "You're sure to be noticed" promised

Suzuki, thanks to the 4U's "stylish alloy wheels" and "silver overfender kit" to complement the Miami Blue or True Green metallic paintwork. And that was pretty much it; although, yet again, the ad included a couple of 'bright young things' smiling longingly into each others eyes. **4x4**

Bright young things, plus some brightly coloured Vitaras...



Unique Performers



FIRST DRIVE

Suzuki Vitara



WELCOME BACK!

Old enough to have been around at the original Suzuki Vitara launch, the Editor was keen to try out the brand new 2015 version

So, now we have the new Suzuki Vitara. It's an astonishing 27 years since the first version, and this sixth generation Vitara model comes to do battle in the highly competitive small compact SUV segment; thought by the experts to be the fastest growing and most significant in the market. Now, 27 years is a long time, and while many readers will have fond memories of the original Vitara, indeed a good number as owners, it's quite possible that potential new owners will have few emotional links with that significant original Suzuki. In short, the new Vitara needs to be a lot more than just a famous name.

Thankfully, the Vitara is a good-looker; not quite as significant a game-changer as the original perhaps, but smart in its own right. The colours of the models shown here emphasise

that while you could select boring silver, black or white, there are some great funky colours available. The marketing push from Suzuki will also emphasise that the new Vitara offers 'personalisation' allowing an owner to select different exterior and interior options. Now the cynics among us will comment that apart from Henry Ford's anecdotal comment about the Model T that, 'you can have any colour as long as it's black', we have long been able to personalise our vehicles. However, with the Vitara this now includes more than just model colours and roof changes, but also various accents on the body can be chrome or black. There's an Urban and a Rugged option pack, although the Rugged actually includes a plastic front skid plate so the less said about that the better really (although we confess it looks good!). Inside you can match some of the fascia trim with the

body colour, quite garish in some cases, and you can even choose a different background details for the central clock.

When it comes to engine and transmission choices, things are a little simpler. There are two engine options, the 1.6-litre petrol and similar sized DDiS diesel option, both of which deliver 118bhp. There is, however, a significant difference in the torque with the petrol only managing 156Nm (115lb ft) while the diesel has a noticeably stronger 320Nm (236lb ft); something worth considering should you be thinking of towing anything larger than a shoebox. Transmission options are a little mixed; a five speed manual and a six speed automatic are available with the petrol unit, while the diesel is only available with a six speed manual. Emissions are impressively low with the petrol five speed quoted CO₂ figure is

Above: The new Suzuki Vitara has some great new colours. It's a smart compact SUV

130g/km, the six speed manual 131g/km and for the diesel it is only 111g/km. The latter model also having a claimed Combined Fuel Economy of 67.2mpg. There are 2WD options, and we are obviously only concerned with the four-wheel drive ALLGRIP models, but it is worth mentioning that the 2WD diesel has a CO₂ emissions rating of 106g/km and a Combined mpg figure of 70.6mpg. Rather small differences, helping to dispel the myth about four-wheel drive models being environmental abusing gas guzzlers...

When discussing small differences, the one question about the new Vitara is where it fits in the Suzuki range, given that the S-Cross is already there. We have yet to see the two models side-by-side, but when looking at the dimensions of the two models they look so similar. For example, Vitara/S-Cross: Length, 4175mm/4300mm; height, 1610/1575; width, 1775/1765; wheelbase, 2500/2600, ground clearance, 185/170. Given that the Vitara is actually built on a version of the S-Cross platform, it is hardly surprising, but you are left to wonder quite how you differentiate between the two. In simple terms the Vitara is considerably better looking as an SUV, but if we are to believe the S-Cross TV commercials everyone in your street wants one. Quite how the 152 Suzuki dealers in the UK explain the differences will be a challenge. You wonder how long the S-Cross will continue if Vitara sales take off to the extent that Suzuki's animated sales and marketing director Daryl White predicts. He believes that they will 'build on the success of the S-Cross'. Hard not to see that the success of the Vitara won't be at the expense of the S-Cross. We know which one we would choose.

The Vitara has the established on-demand ALLGRIP four-wheel drive

system, again similar to the S-Cross but now with the addition of Hill Descent Control (standard on the top of the range SZ4 ALLGRIP models). All Vitara models also now get the useful Hill Hold Control. On our first drive, we were unable to test the Hill Descent as the ridiculous sand pit off-road 'test' course we drove had a 'hill' so shallow and short we are not convinced the Hill Descent even activated. Pointless. Now we have no reason to doubt that it is a fine option, but it would have been nice to actually find out. A full appreciation of the Vitara's off-road ability, admittedly as a 'mild' soft-roader, will have to wait until the model comes to the UK. It may have to go some to match the Jeep Renegade, surely one major competitor.

On the road, you immediately appreciate that Suzuki certainly build decent vehicles these days. The Vitara feels well built, and the diesel engine model we drove was certainly quiet on motorways and enjoyable on the winding coastal roads. We were not able to drive a petrol engine model, a shame since the company believes 75 per cent of UK Vitaras will be so powered, but the diesel is sprightly enough and the steering, suspension, ride and handling combination gives the driver enough information to truly enjoy the drive. Indeed, we have heard that there may be a Vitara Sport version in the future, perhaps powered by a turbocharged version of the petrol engine and certainly Suzuki chassis engineers have a good platform to start from if that's the case.

We have commented before that Suzuki models have a good build quality, one that probably surprises potential new buyers; the manufacturer's main problem is to get people behind the wheel, once there it's likely they will be impressed. With the new Vitara, however, we do have a couple of reservations. The



'personalisation' aspect means you can bring the outside body colour into the fascia and instrument bezel trim. Our choice would be to avoid that, the bright colour and plastic texture looks a little cheap, not helped by some of the bright shiny black trim elsewhere. It's a shame because important things like seats are of a good quality, comfortable and smart. Much has also been made of the fact that the Vitara is lightweight and therefore economical, but it means that the doors, especially the rears, feel flimsy - as if they will 'snap' if slammed shut too hard.

Price wise, the new Vitara looks like being very competitive. On the road, the petrol ALLGRIP is £19,799, the diesel ALLGRIP £21,299, with both the Urban and Rugged option trim packs an additional £500 - most people will include these. It makes the Vitara cheaper than the Renegade, and also cheaper (better looking, similar sized, newer and more funky) than the S-Cross...

It would always have been a mistake to consider that a new Vitara could stun the market the way the original did. Times have changed, significantly. However, there is something about the new Vitara that shows it has the character, the looks and the abilities to proudly wear the name. If Suzuki can get people into the dealerships and behind the wheel, it's also likely to be a success. Welcome back, Vitara. **4x4**

We like: Design, overall build quality, character, ride and handling

We dislike: Interior trim details, flimsy doors and plastic skid plates for heaven's sake!

Top: Much as we dislike plastic skid plates (chocolate tea pots comes to mind), we have to admit that the Rugged trim Vitara looks good

Above: The personalisation includes matching the exterior colour inside; not sure it works, and looks a little 'cheap'

Left: The ALLGRIP versions now have Hill Descent Control. One thing that differentiates the Vitara from the S-Cross



WOMAN'S OWN

Meet Jeanette James, accountant by day, yet a British born rally driver and 4x4 off-road instructor who has worked with all the top 4x4 manufacturers around the world while holding down family life and a day job. Now that's multi-tasking...

Words: Hils Everitt

There was nothing for it but to keep the throttle to the floor and pray for a bit of luck. The VW Amarok was at full pelt on a steep rocky hill, but there was a massive hole on the other side. "If we landed in the hole that was it, rally over!" laughs Jeanette James, 4x4 off-road driving instructor and top ranking female 4x4 rally driver. A combination of smart driving and, she admits, a bit of luck, saw the pick-up truck bounce off a handy rock, sending

the VW soaring over the massive hole, and the race to the number one podium spot was still on.

The Rally in question was the Rallye Aicha des Gazelles (RAG), a navigational, female-only event created in 1990 which is run every year in the Moroccan desert. This event focuses on environmental impact and therefore is not about pure speed, but about driving the shortest distance possible with no GPS, where good old fashioned navigational and off-road driving skills



Jeanette James (right) and her co-driver Anne Marie celebrate top spot

combine to take top spot.

Competitors, or 'Gazelles', have the freedom to choose their own route; eco driving is highly encouraged and, ultimately, rewarded. Predefined check points have to be reached in the least number of kilometres; there's a choice of driving around a mountain or



crossing over it, or driving through the dunes rather than avoiding them. This is what appeals to Jeanette, who loves a challenge.

"I once decided to take a short cut down a cliff face. My co-pilot decided to get out and walk and all the photographers at the bottom of the cliff thought I was crazy," she smiles. Jeanette impressed them all with a perfect descent of the cliff to mass applause from the admiring crowd at the bottom. She could relate 'hundreds of stories of moments when we thought the vehicle would break'; but somehow it never does, and she has an impressive success rate.

Jeanette has competed in five RAGs, firstly in the Crossover (which has its own course, naturally), and then the 4x4 classes. The Rallye also includes Quad, Truck and Motorbike classes. She made her inaugural participation in 2009 in a Mercedes-Benz 4x4 Viano, which actually brought its own, surprising, complications. "When we turned up for the entry, the stewards wouldn't let us in!" That was because

they had entered into the Crossover class and the steward took one look at their 'van' and decided it couldn't possibly be an entrant. If the guys on the gate had bothered to look inside they would have spotted the roll cage, racing seats and six-point harnesses which would have convinced them a lot earlier, before the girls had to insist they lifted the barrier and let them park alongside the other race cars.

In 2009 she and her co-pilot decided to take the 'let's have fun with this' approach, which also meant decking out the Viano people carrier's interior in pink, wearing pink helmets and not stressing out. It obviously worked, as they won the Crossover class.

The Viano had been given to them by Mercedes after it had come back from the Dakar Rally. Their 2009 win impressed the German manufacturer, so for 2010 they presented Jeanette and her co-driver Anne Marie Borg with a 4x4 Sprinter van which they entered into the 4x4 class. That outing resulted in an impressive 17th place - out of 120 - and, for 2011, a prototype Sprinter

Left: James's VW Amarok powers on through the shortest route across Moroccan dunes

Right: Pressure was on in 2012 - no win, no more Rallye from VW

Below: Taking a stroll for a recce



THE 4X4 INTERVIEW

Jeanette James



◀ was designed for the pair. It was to come to a sad end. "We were in second place, but lost power on the crest of a sand dune so we lost grip and rolled, although it was all very gentle," remembers Jeanette.

Jeanette didn't race for Mercedes again as they took a year out in 2012 when Daimler took only girls working for the company and they couldn't get a budget together to enter themselves. But in 2013 the team was back with a vengeance when Jeanette got a call from Volkswagen while she was in Singapore, working for Jeep. One of VW's team members had dropped out and, at the last minute, Jeanette

Top: Mercedes-Benz was down and out after rolling over the top of a dune - Rallye over...

Right: Rocky outcrops are just one of the hazards of the RAG

Below: Navigation is vital and the James team plans its shortest route



accepted the place. This was her first outing in the Amarok, fully kitted out and favourite for a top spot. The James/Borg/Amarok combo worked brilliantly, securing second place, and they were back on course as the world's foremost female rally team. By now they were competing in the 'Expert' class, set up to make the competition more even and give other less experienced drivers the chance to shine in the standard categories.

The road to such impressive heights started when Jeanette left her native London for France, to become a canoe instructor in the beautiful Ardeche Valley. On the way she travelled through the Alps and instantly found an affinity with the mountains. After she returned

to London to finish her university degree in accountancy, Jeanette headed back to France for a ski season, and ended up working for Killy in Val d'Isere. The famous ski resort was the venue for the annual Salon de Val d'Isere, one of the world's best 4x4 shows at that time (and which sadly no longer exists).

"I drove 4x4s and learnt to drive off-road, which eventually led to taking instructor exams with Land Rover Experience France (LRE) invited by Philippe Cornut. I then entered the world of 4x4 in my spare time, while doing accountancy during the '9-5' shift," she explains.

This has meant working for the likes of Jeep, Toyota, BMW (training for the X3 and X5 in North Africa and the

Caribbean and more recently the X6), the new Mini and Nissan on launches and training days. "I was working on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van launch which led to me first taking part in the Rallye when a colleague asked if I was interested in taking part," she says, grateful to Mercedes-Benz's Thomas Kazelmann who started the rally-driving ball rolling for her. She now works as a LRE Instructor at weekends in France, where she permanently lives these days, and still appears at manufacturer launches; in fact we first met Jeanette at the RAV4 20th anniversary jaunt in Greece, as featured in a recent issue.

Jeanette actually lives on the Cote d'Azur, about 40km from St Tropez. She is still an accountant by day, when not taking part in high profile rallies or attending manufacturers' launches and 4x4 training days. When we spoke, she had just returned from the ski resort of Tignes, in the French Alps, where she

an LRE instructor as well, she must have divided loyalties, knowing the intense rivalry between the two iconic marques? "Jeep versus Land Rover?" she smiles. "They each have their attributes and character," she says, sanguinely, with her feet firmly planted on the fence.

"I also loved the Daihatsu Fourtrak when I was little and have always been a big fan of the Wrangler; it is the last one on the market now that really looks like, and has the heart of, a 4x4," she says sadly.

"The trouble with Land Rovers is they are so expensive, and it's tragic that the Defender stops production this year," adds the owner of a beloved 20-year old 300Tdi. (When we spoke, the news that the Land Rover would be shifting the Defender (limited) production line to a country that's cheaper with fewer stringent rules had not come out so, no doubt, Jeanette is now celebrating

We laugh a lot, shout at each other; there are tears sometimes and strong emotions come out, but we are also good friends, which is really important in the Rallye scenario

was working for Jeep on an owner training week. "Jeep invites new owners to a free day's training and we have them driving over specially designed bridges and seesaws to see how their Jeeps perform." The difference in Tignes, however, is that there is also an ice track for some real fun and the chance to demonstrate and teach top skills.

"We had all the models there, including the Cherokee Trailhawk, which is brilliant, and the new Renegade. I love the new technology and EBS systems. The Renegade was very impressive: it's safe, has a low centre of gravity and was superb in the snow and ice," she comments enthusiastically. As

somewhere in the mountains as she prepares for this year's Rallye.)

It so happens that 2015 is a big year for the RAG, marking its 25th anniversary this March. For the first time, an all-British team is entering the event - which has a dominating French flavour - running a Freelander, piloted by two Rallye novices, who are models by trade.

In the past, Jeanette has been the only native Brit to take part, alongside her French teammate. Jeanette is very pleased about the all-British entry as it is encouraging women to get out of their comfort zone and do something challenging and adventurous. There is another British novice with a French



Top: James instructs at Jeep training days at Jeep training days at weekends...

Above: ... as well as working at Land Rover Experience France owner events

Below: Rallye helicopter pays a visit as Amarok tries to dig itself out

teammate in the Crossover class, in another VW Amarok. The event runs from March 25th to April 4th, so take a look at the website to see how Jeanette and her fellow Brits are getting on.

Although Jeanette and Anne Marie are now competing in the 17-vehicle Expert class, and their vehicle is a specially-prepped racing machine compared to the old Mercedes Viano, the competitiveness and seriousness of what they are doing is still tempered by the need to enjoy themselves and have fun: "We laugh a lot, shout at each other; there are tears sometimes and strong emotions come out, but we are also good friends, which is really important in the Rallye scenario," she nods. With their experience and camaraderie they know they can get themselves out of any situation; the dunes are particularly hazardous: "It's no big deal when we get stuck; which happens often; it can be 20 times a day. We just get the shovels out and get on with it; sometimes the digging relieves the stress of the race!" she admits.

The driving is tough and only the strong and determined survive. "It can take 2/3 hours to dig ourselves out of a sand hole; then we get going and 200 metres later it happens again: You can't think: 'I'm so tired, I've had enough'; you just have to be really disciplined. We never question each other's decisions or start discussions like other teams, that's



THE 4X4 INTERVIEW

Jeanette James



◀ counterproductive. We just get on with it and reach the next checkpoint the shortest way we can find."

That philosophy works well for the two mature women who have had to juggle family life, 4x4 driving, ski instructing (in Anne Marie's case) an important day job and rallying. That makes it tougher for women and is probably why there are so few in international off-road rallying. In 2012 a male team was invited to take part to see what they thought of it. "One was a well-known navigator, who'd climbed Everest, the other a French motorcyclist, fresh from Dakar. They coped with the navigation and got a podium place. Afterwards they said: 'We thought we'd come for a party; we never imagined it would be so tough...' They missed the bivouac one night – it is a long and gruelling event. When men get lost they get frustrated and angry," she laughs knowingly!

The more controlled James/Borg team came second in the RAG in 2013, and in 2014 VW entered 10 cars and declared that if a VW didn't win, then it would pull out of 2015 altogether. So plenty of pressure, although Jeanette thrived on that so much that they did indeed win in 2014 – "I saw it as a challenge." She is also keen to take part in the Dakar Rally, but getting sponsorship and team backing is very difficult, if not impossible. "So few

We had all the models there, including the Cherokee Trailhawk, which is brilliant, and the new Renegade. I love the new technology and EBS systems. The Renegade was very impressive

women take part and it is tragic really," she sighs. "Racing against men is a mindset. We can be on an even footing and get a good result."

Jeanette was soon off to three training days with the VW team off-road in France, then it would be to Morocco to train the other new girls. "Doing the training is also good for me," she says, "as I spend a lot of time hauling other people out of the sand, so it's good practice," she laughs. We wish the James/Borg team the best of luck for another British top spot in the 'long and gruelling event', plus the novice British girls, and hope both teams avoid the rocky holes they'll undoubtedly find along the route.

RALLYE DES GAZELLES

Rallye des Gazelles also runs the Coeur des Gazelles – a non-profit organisation that works on projects with the Moroccan government www.gazelle-



Top: Victorious in pink having not been taken seriously at the start line

Above: Spotting from co-driver is vital on Moroccan rocks

harambee.org of which Jeanette James and Anne Marie Borg are honorary members. It helps women – such as Maasai widows – to start up businesses and take courses in various trades. For more details check out www.rallyeichadesgazelles.com **4x4**



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0701369	423	Splines -29; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 90 mm	NISSAN PATROL Patrol MK/MQ	£ 65.00
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0700700	433	Splines -17; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 83 mm	ISUZU TFS54 2.5TD->1990-2006 TFS77 3.0TD ->2003-2006 TROOPER UB555 2.8TD-> 1988-1992 UB569 3.1TD 1992-	£ 75.00
0701370	440	Splines -24; Bolts -5; P.C.D. - 90 mm	DAIHATSU Rocky/Feroza	£ 75.00
0077376	443	Splines -28; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 88 mm	DAIHATSU CHALLENGER 2.5TD K94 1998-> 2.8TD K97 1996-> 3.0 P K96 1998-> L200 K22 2.0P 1986-1996	£ 65.00
0078593	445	Splines -31; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 90 mm	NISSAN PATROL Y60, Y61 FORD MAVERICK	£ 75.00
0700694	452	Splines -27; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 83 mm	NISSAN D21 TERRANO II	£ 75.00
0701328	454	Splines -30; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 90 mm	TOYOTA FZJ80 4.5P V6-1995-1998	£ 65.00
0700698	455	Splines -30; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 92 mm	TOYOTA LAND CRUISER - HZJ/HDJ78/79/80	£ 70.00
460	460	Splines -26; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 76 mm	KIA SPORTAGE GRAND SPORTAGE RETONA BONGO	£ 80.00
0700692	461	Splines -28; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 83 mm	NISSAN D22 D40 4CC	£ 75.00
0701329	462	Splines -30; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 92 mm	TOYOTA HDJ100 4.2TD-1998->	£ 65.00
0078549	466	Splines -26; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 90 mm	DAIHATSU FOURTRAK 2.8TD F78 1993->	£ 80.00
0700699	470	Splines -27; Internal Mount	Mazda B2500/Ford Ranger WL40 2.5TD 1998-2000	£ 65.00
0077656	521	Splines -30; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 90 mm	TOYOTA HILUX/SURF IMPORT LN106	£ 65.00
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0077065HP	413HP	Splines -26; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 90 mm	TOYOTA HILUX/SURF IMPORT LN107, LN130, 4 RUNNER KZN 130	£ 90.00
0700700HP	433HP	Splines -17; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 83 mm	ISUZU TFS54 2.5TD-> 1990-2006	£ 90.00
0077376HP	443HP	Splines -28; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 88 mm	DAIHATSU Challenger K96, K97, K94 L200 4X4 K74, K77, K76, K22, K34, K94 Pajero/Shogun L044/L049/L141/L146/	£ 85.00
0700694HP	452HP	Splines -27; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 83 mm	NISSAN D21 TERRANO II	£ 95.00
0700692HP	461HP	Splines -28; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 83 mm	NISSAN D22 D40 4CC	£ 95.00
0078549HP	466HP	Splines -26; Bolts -6; P.C.D. - 90 mm	DAIHATSU FOURTRAK 2.8TD F78 1993->	£ 95.00

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FEATURE VEHICLE

Hummer Discovery

RATTLE AND HUM

When Richard Bird realised he wasn't going to find a Desert Storm Humvee on eBay, he decided to make his own version... from an old Discovery!

Words and photography: Rob Hawkins



“I went to a scrapyards that was breaking a Hummer and bought a bonnet, front wings, rear shackles, the door mirrors and roof lights for £500,” explains Richard Bird on how he transformed a 1999 Series One Discovery into the vehicle seen here.

With total costs, including the purchase of the Discovery, adding up to a mere £3600, he has clearly had to be creative and very much hands on. The vents on the A-panels for instance, are from B&Q. The rear lights are from a trailer, the tailgate is from a Ford Ranger, the rear window was once a side window in a Defender and the mesh guard on the outside of the cab is a dog guard from a Discovery.

While fitting parts from other cars has helped, hours of fabrication have gone into this project. The donor Discovery with its 3.9-litre V8 and LPG tanks had to be cut and chopped into a pick-up, and the rear was extended by six inches. Richard brought in a specialist fabricator welder to do this work and it took a whole two weeks to complete (the entire project took two months from start to finish). Four inch square box section steel was used to create the pick-up bodywork at the rear and make sure the Ford Ranger drop down tailgate would be secure. The loading area has been lined in chequerplate and decorated with an army ammunition toolbox, Chinese manufactured plastic AK47 and a fold out spade, all of which ➤

Below inset: Richard Bird and the only Humvee he had available from which to create his own out of a Discovery



FEATURE VEHICLE

Hummer Discovery



Above left: Hummer square window effect has been achieved with aluminium sheet, aluminium strips and pop rivets



Left middle: Rear of cab uses side window from a Defender and a dog guard from a Discovery



Below left: Pick-up conversion was made using four inch box section steel and is finished off at the rear with a Ford Ranger tailgate

Right: Front tilting bonnet is a genuine Hummer, cut down in length by seven inches

◀ have been painted in official Desert Storm Sand. Richard used 63 tins of this paint and covered all the bodywork in it (he bought 80 tins for a bargain £167), adding fake bullet holes for special effects.

At the front, the Hummer bonnet was chopped down in length by seven inches and mounted on some new framework made from the same four inch box section as used on the rear. This is secured to an aftermarket bumper that bolts to the Discovery's front chassis legs. The modified Hummer bonnet uses the original

Hummer hinges to tilt forwards, and those front shackles should pull anything out of the mud – they are usually found on tug boats to pull ships into harbour.

Original Humvees have a couple of hooks fitted to the bonnet, which allow them to be lifted away by a helicopter. Richard wasn't planning to use the same method of airlifting for his vehicle, but he has fitted a pair of exhaust clamps to the top of the bonnet, covered them in rubber fuel hose and painted them to look authentic. Other creative aspects include the fitting of a ▶

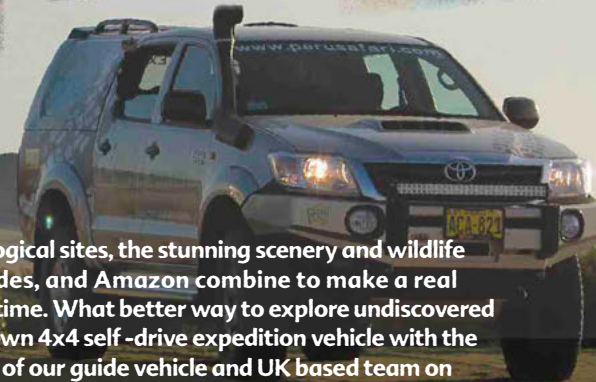




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FEATURE VEHICLE

Hummer Discovery



◀ Jeep Cherokee front grille, which has been slightly modified to fit, but the results are pretty close to the original.

With a taller bonnet, the front scuttle panel needed to be raised, so this was modified by constructing a framework, which can be removed by withdrawing the bonnet pins to gain access to the brake master cylinder.

The biggest challenge for this conversion was to make the glasswork look like a Humvee. All of the glass is vertical, so Richard realised he would have to compromise on the windscreen. He has however, fitted a plastic strip that's usually fitted to double-glazing, to create a split screen

effect. Using plastic was the only solution as metal would damage the shorter 11 inch long windscreen wipers.

As for the side windows, transforming them to look like they belong to a Humvee involved lots of sheet aluminium, which is fitted to the exterior, plus a staggering 40 metres of aluminium trim. The advantage of this approach is the electric windows still work inside the plating.

At all four corners of the vehicle, the Weller wheels and Conway tyres measure 31 inches in diameter, but the suspension remains standard, with the exception of spring assistors at the rear.

Exterior accessories include lots of lighting, including a 49 inch long two row LED light strip for £130 that's mounted over the windscreen and produces an astonishing amount of light. Plus, all the roof lights are standard Hummer.

Richard decided to retain the LPG system on the Discovery's V8 engine, and there are two cylindrical tanks underneath each sill of the vehicle. Consequently, while the V8 will return no more than 25mpg on petrol, it returns an equivalent 30-35mpg on LPG. The engine has covered just over 100,000 miles and has been mildly modified with an open cone air filter and 8mm silicone Magnecor HT leads.

The intention for this vehicle wasn't to recreate a Humvee, but to produce

TECH SPEC:

Base model:

1999 Land Rover Discovery Series One with pick-up conversion, Hummer bonnet, Ford Ranger tailgate

Engine: 3.9-litre V8 with LPG conversion, standard fuel injection system, uprated Magnecor HT leads and open cone air filter

Gearbox: Four-speed automatic with selectable two and four-wheel drive

Brakes: Dual circuit system with servo assistance, discs and calipers all round

Suspension: Standard length coil overs all round with rear spring assistors

Wheels and tyres: Weller steel wheels with 31 inch diameter Conway tyres

Total cost: £3600 and is now for sale at the same price

Above left: Original Disco interior is retained. Notice how the aluminium sheet has been fitted to the exterior of the door glass

something that resembles it, and also to have a bit of fun making and using it. With approximately 1000 rivets, only a scaled down plastic version as guidance and an estimated 500 hours of hard work put into the conversion, Richard is understandably delighted with the overall results, especially the reaction from people when they see it for the first time, as he explains: "Dogs bark at it, children run away from it and it provokes a reaction wherever you drive it of either shock, horror, disbelief or preferably, smiles!" **4x4**

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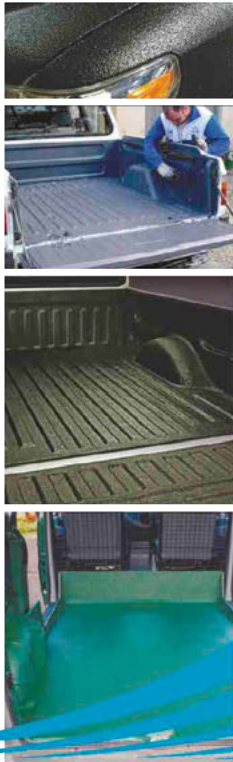
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FOAM PARTY

While you may well have given your suspension some thought, it's unlikely you have considered foam cell dampers. We explain what these are and how they work, before fitting versions from Ironman to test on our Ford Ranger

Words and photography: Robert Pepper

What's the first technical details you look at on a vehicle? My guess is that it is probably the power and torque. I'll leave it to another article to explain just how wrong that is, but for the moment let's get back to the old saying, 'power is nothing without control'. It may be a cliché, but it happens to be true – especially when it comes to your 4x4.

So if you want control, suspension is a good place to start. For any vehicle, there are two main aims – you want a good ride (comfort from A to B), and handling (predictable responsiveness to control). Even if you're not designing a sports car, a responsive, easily controlled car feels better to drive, is safer and less tiring.

For 4x4s, the list gets a bit longer and more difficult compared to a road

car. We have an especial need for strength – resistance to damage and impact. Our suspension must also work over a wider range of loads, perhaps from a weight of 2200 to 3200kg. We also need supple, long travel suspension, which doesn't help with on-road handling as it means extra body roll. And then there's designing for fade and failure.

To see why that's a problem let's recap how suspension works. Basically, the springs (leaf, coil, air, torsion etc) absorb bumps in the road, and then dampers dampen out the resulting bounce. There's lots of different ways to design dampers, but they all work in much the same way as a coffee plunger – a piston is attached to a circular disc with holes in it, and that's forced through a cylinder containing oil which provides the damping effect through

friction. The energy from the bouncing spring is converted to heat, which is then dissipated to the atmosphere. But if heat is generated more quickly than can be dissipated, then the damper heats up to the point where the damping no longer works effectively, affecting both ride and handling, leading ultimately to a complete failure. You can still drive on, it's just uncontrollably bouncy so you have to go very slowly.

So suspension, especially for 4x4s, is complicated and requires a lot of compromises. Nevertheless, what would you do if you had a clean sheet for a design, the budget to do what you wanted and decades of experience in designing and supplying suspension? You and I can only imagine, but three years ago that was the reality for Ironman 4x4.

The list of objectives was simple;

create a new range-topping damper that would be the strongest and toughest on the market, yet follow the Ironman philosophy of 'affordable quality'. The result is the Foam Cell Pro, and the concept of a foam cell damper will need some introduction.

A basic problem of damper design is that when the piston goes down into the damper cylinder it takes up space - imagine a cup brimful of water and you put a spoon in, it'll spill over because liquids tend not to be compressible. You could solve the problem by leaving an air gap, but air heats up easily, mixes with oil (aeration) and that ruins the damping as the valves are designed for oil, not a mix of air and oil.

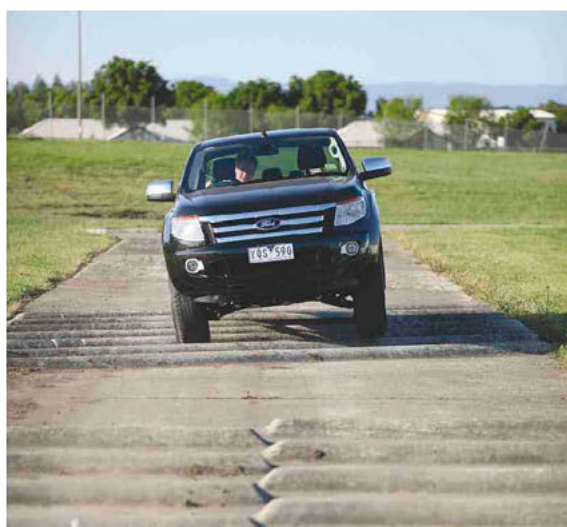
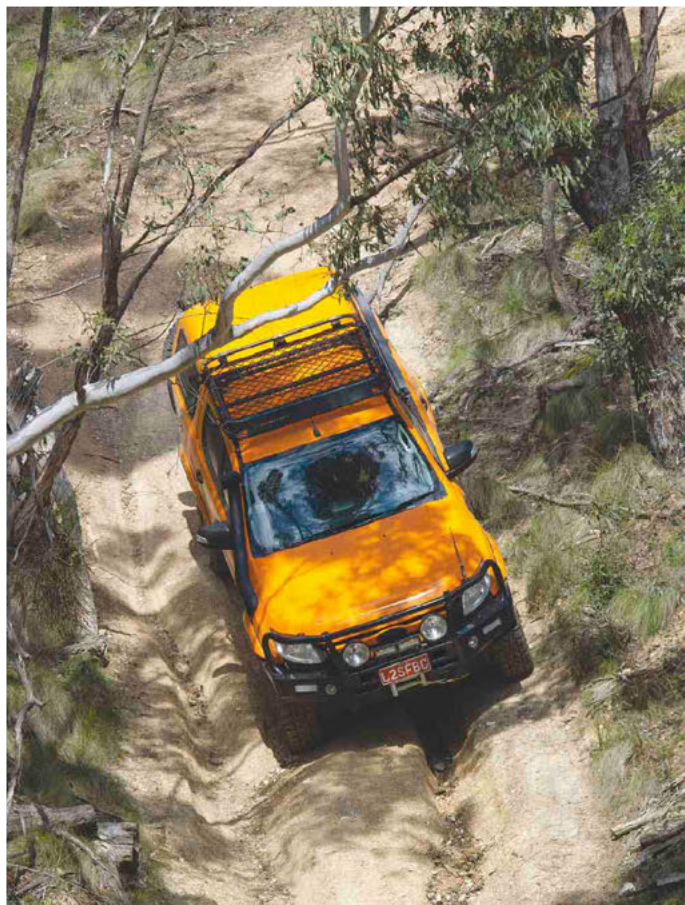
The way good dampers are designed is typically to use a compressible, but heat-resistant gas such as nitrogen, so when the piston goes down, the gas is compressed. Both monotube and twintube dampers work on that same basic principle.

A foam cell damper is a bit different. It is a twin-tube design, but instead of pressurised gas it uses a foam layer made of cells filled with nitrogen. This foam layer compresses when the piston enters the damper cylinder, and decompresses when it exits. One advantage of this design is that the oil is spread more evenly around the damper body, as distinct from the gas solution, which compresses the gas into a small area of the damper. This means the surface area of the oil against the tube is increased, and so heat dissipation is

improved. Another advantage is that there's no way gas and oil can mix, so aeration cannot happen. On the other hand, the gas in a non-foam damper heats up as it expands. This expansion puts the oil under pressure, which raises its boiling point. This cannot happen in a foam cell damper, which is why foam cells are typically larger volume to compensate for the fact they don't get this pressure advantage.

So the engineers at Ironman were faced with a choice - monotube, twintube, or foam cell. They chose foam cell as it offered a long-travel design, and better heat dissipation (resistance to fade) than conventional twin-tube. But what of foam's disadvantages? The first one is a myth, and that's that the foam disintegrates. Ironman have been making foam cell dampers for years and not experienced this problem. If they had, then they'd hardly have been likely to launch their top model as a foam cell. Second one is that once overheated and aerated, foam cell dampers don't return to normal after they cool. This again is incorrect because unlike a normal twin-tube, which has gas atop the oil with no barrier, the gas inside the cells of foam cannot mix with the oil. The foam cells also take up less room inside the damper tube than the gas in a conventional monotube, which means there's more space for oil and the more oil you have, the cooler the damper runs.

As foam cells are a form of twin-tube, then if the outer tube is damaged



(unlikely) the damper still works. That said, a well-made monotube is extremely hard to dent!

Above: Ironman in the process of developing the suspension on a test track

One reason not to go for a monotube was cost and longevity - monos have gas under high-pressure, which creates stress for seals and increases manufacturing costs. Yet that high pressure means monos also offer a more precise control of damping than twin tube designs, and there's just the one set of valves to run through the oil.

Left: A shock dyno cycles the shock for a set number of compressions and extensions, measuring the force required and the time taken. This is used to model shocks and tune designs

A remote-canister damper was a possibility, but quickly discounted as while the design offers the advantage of improving fade resistance through good heat dissipation, it is expensive, can be difficult to package, and the engineers ➤



TECHNICAL

Foam Cell Dampers



◀ felt that a large-bore foam cell could meet the needs of even heavy-duty recreational users.

So with the basic design of a foam cell locked in, Ironman looked at how to make the dampers stronger and better. Their engineers started with a 3mm steel outer body, added a one-piece mount base, put a 360 degree weld on the eye ring, used a 20mm chrome piston rod and made dual independent seals around the piston. The piston shroud is made of HPDE, a super-tough plastic, and the metal parts are treated electrophoretically (EDP), which is more like a plating process than painting.

There's also a built-in bumpstop where applicable, just in case the damper gets over compressed, and the oil is a premium-grade Fuchs blend which has a high boiling point and minimal degradation over time.

That took care of strength and durability. The next objective was useful features. Here we find rubber bushings (where the damper connects to the mount points) for good NVH (noise, vibration and harshness). Where the dampers are designed within a coil spring (coil over) then the coil mount is on a threaded spring seat, so you can adjust the ride height of the vehicle

Top: These tracks aren't tough axle-twisting adventures, but they go on for hundreds of kilometres so you need to make reasonable progress, not just crawl along in second low. The handling of the vehicle becomes critical – it's a tough ask to keep a heavily loaded 4WD under control, let alone one moving over ground that is rough, sandy, rocky or all three!

Left: The Foam Cell Pro next to the normal Foam Cell shock, and the original manufacturer equivalent

Bottom left: Not a Pro, but a cutaway of a standard foam cell damper showing the foam insert. It's not very thick, and is easily compressed with your fingers

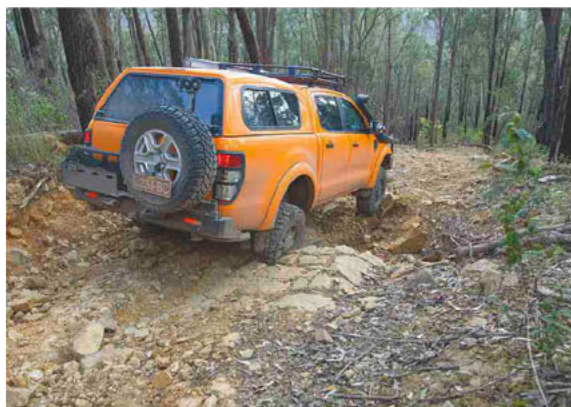
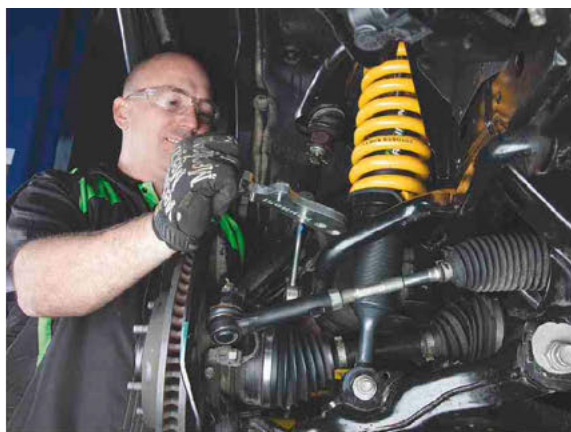
easily without needing to change springs. Ironman also claim the threads provide a heat sink effect. The coil overs also feature a rubber rather than metal spring seat cushion, again for NVH purposes.

The dampers are also fully rebuildable, although given their new price I would question the economics vs a new set, and it's not really a DIY job. Nevertheless, it's not a bad feature and if just one component did need replacing then that could be handy when travelling.

Then we come to the size. Ironman makes much of the size of the Pros, and in general what sells in the 4x4 industry is bigger and stronger – wrong in my view, but it's true. So why is a bigger damper better, is there a downside, and at what point do we stop making dampers larger and larger?

Bigger dampers need less internal pressure to do the same job as thinner dampers (double volume, quarter the pressure), and less pressure means better durability as less stress on the seals. Bigger dampers have more oil volume, and therefore more ability to absorb heat, in the same way lakes take longer to heat up than a pond. There's also more surface area as the tube is larger, and that helps with heat dissipation. The corresponding disadvantage is that once heated, the damper will take longer to cool, and the physically larger the damper, the heavier





it is, and weight is always detrimental to performance, particularly with respect to suspension. And the larger the damper, the less pressure the oil is under so you don't get an advantage of increasing the oil's boiling point, which erodes the big damper's advantage of greater oil volume.

The damping front is interesting. Consider a very thin damper and a very thick one and then compress both by say 30mm. To meet the damping needs of the car both are going to need to provide exactly the same resistance and energy absorption, but the larger damper will spread that load over a greater volume of oil using larger or more valves. On the other hand, the thinner damper would be better at fine-grained, precise control because there's less oil to flow through the valves, the oil would be under higher pressure, and there's less inertia with smaller components.

For 4x4 overlanding, the trade off is clear – we start with vehicles that weigh

Above: Ironman units being fitted to the Ford Ranger. Dampers are critical for slow speed control over rocks. Unless you don't actually care about panel damage that is...

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE FOAM CELL PRO DAMPERS

My Ranger had a mixed suspension setup – Old Man Emu longer springs in the front for a lift, and an extra leaf added to the rear with four Bilstein dampers. The result was good, and I've been a big fan of Bilstein dampers for quite a while having run them in my Defender. But I'd never run foam suspension before, so Ironman offered to replace all my dampers and springs, including four Foam Cell Pros.

I'm writing this after several thousand kilometres. Ironman did the lift properly at the back. Previously, I had some vibration around the second gear mark, but the engineers put some spacers in to even out the tailshaft angles and now the car is vibration-free. However, the front end wasn't so good. It was lifted a bit too high, which gave me a massive 330mm of clearance under the front – but had the unfortunate side effect of making the steering rather too sensitive, and giving the car a negative rake when loaded. That means the front is higher than the rear. I also managed to break a CV joint, only the third one I've ever busted. Can't claim that is the fault of the lift alone, but bigger lifts never help.

Anyway, I had the front lowered by 30mm, which was easy as it's just a case of screwing the spring mount down on the threads, as opposed to the usual change of swapping to a shorter set of springs. It takes a special tool, but it's nevertheless

easy enough. Similarly, if I'd have bought the car without a bull bar and winch, then added both, the height could have been adjusted to compensate although in that case the spring rate might need to be changed too.

Over rough bumps the ride is good, plush even. There's great control over big rocks too. If you really push on the tarmac, there's a little more body roll than with the Bilstiens, but it's liveable. The only negative is the ride on smoothish surfaces is a little fidgety, something I suspected but now with the front back to where it should be can confirm. Watch this space for more updates, but in summary, so far, I have no real complaints. Ironman suspension hasn't advanced vehicle handling to a whole new level and it's doubtful any damper/spring set-up could, because while important, there's only so much suspension can do. Also, to be fair all the good aftermarket manufacturers do a decent job of tuning and to a great degree a 'good' tune is personal preference, dependent on your driving style and use.

What Ironman has done very well is move the market forwards by delivering high-quality, strong, well-tuned dampers at a price-point that will worry their premium-priced competition, and for that reason I'd certainly put them on any shortlist. Watch my Our 4x4s column for further updates.

2200kg plus on tyres that aren't exactly sports car grade, then we add 300-500kg of gear as standard accessories, put in a lift and then fit heavy off-road tyres with large tread blocks, then add another half-tonne of people and camping gear. Having very precise damper control after all that is kind of pointless, so we're better off with the improved fade resistance and plusher ride of big-bore dampers, both of which are actually good for rough-terrain handling and ride.

Of course, bigger is only better to a point because there's a limit to how big dampers can be made as there's simple physical size constraints, and at some point the large damper would be so slow-reacting that handling would be compromised as it would still be damping one bounce when the next arrives.

But that's all theory, and the question is how it stands up in practice. I watched as four dampers – a standard unit, then Ironman's Nitro Gas, Foam Cell and

Foam Cell Pro were put through their paces on a dyno. The Foam Cell Pro took almost four times longer to heat up to 120 degC than the OEM equivalent, and it also comfortably beat its two cheaper Ironman stablemates, which both lasted more than double the time of the standard damper.

Ultimately, suspension design is a compromise and to get those tricky trade offs right you need skill based on experience – and Ironman has plenty of both. **4x4**

www.ironman4x4.com



COMPETITION
King of the Hammers



DESTRUCTION DERBY

Mirror, mirror on the wall, which is the hardest of them all? Over seven brutal hills, in the Valley of Johnson is the King of the Hammers, claimed to be the toughest off-road speed event of them all...

Words: Robb Pritchard **Photography:** Robb Pritchard and Kathie Durrett



The hopes and dreams of many are broken on the rocks of Backdoor, Chocolate Thunder and Jackhammer, cars and crews battered to misery against the giant granite blocks. Only one King is crowned, the others on the podium are bitterly disappointed, while the rest of the handful of competitors to finish are considered heroes just for making it back – they are members of an exclusive club; this year, 17 out of 129 starters finished. That's 13 per cent. If this was the success rate of a scientific experiment it would be deemed a total failure!

King of the Hammers has seen massive exponential growth over the few short years since its inception, and can now be considered in the same league as the legendary Dakar as the biggest off-road competition in the world. It equals the rally raid event on the overall number of entrants, but far, far surpasses it in terms of toughness. KoH is unequivocally the hardest off-road speed event in the world. Nothing else even comes close... and this year was the hardest yet. With three laps, including two loops of the infamous Hammers rock crawls, the 2015 event's 212mile course is probably the hardest racetrack the world has ever seen.

Qualifying, especially Power Hour with the top guys attacking the rough track with all they had, was a spectacular event all in itself, but 2009 champion Jason Scherer came away with the pole which offered the tactical advantage of being able to choose when he went to do the one obligatory pass of Backdoor. He took it at the first opportunity and came out at the back end of the top ten, while second place starter Eric Miller blasted off in front on the fast desert section. Behind him were the 4 Wheel Parts-sponsored car of Greg Adler and the Texas branded

car of Clay Gilstrap. Then came the 2014 ULTRA4 European champion Levi Shirley in his stunning new Maxxis-sponsored Campbell chassis singleseater. He took his time in the big rocks of Jackhammer and got through without winching, which he was forced to do as contact with another car off the start line had broken his winch housing. The team had no spares so took their spanners to a spectator's car that had the same winch on it and left a note on the window telling him to come and look for the Lucky Dog tent later.

Near the end of the first lap Miller had a huge lead but disaster struck when a UJ bearing failed and a rear wheel fell off. They had to drag the end of the axle down a trail until they could flex it up on a rock and affect a repair good enough to get them the few miles to the remote pits. It cost over an hour but they were going so well before that they were still in with a shout of the win. Eric certainly drove the wheels off the car. Even event boss Dave Cole commented that he'd never seen a car driven so hard before.

Gilstrap lost a big lead when the electrics burnt out and the hope of a win turned into being the last finisher home and Randy Slawson, the 2012 winner, took over the lead even though since the first lap he was running on only seven cylinders. "Coming to the pits on the end of the second lap we ran out of fuel as with the dropped cylinder we were only getting 1.3 miles to the gallon. My co-driver had to get out and run a mile to the pits and come back with five gallons and that cost us about 20 minutes." But a bigger concern to his chances were reports of him speeding and driving recklessly in the pits, issues that were investigated after the race.

Lucky Dog's Levi Shirley was then looking good but was slowed for most of the race with problems with his front shocks, and Eric Miller's epic recovery ➤



COMPETITION

King of the Hammers



◀ drive almost paid off but another steering pump issue, similar to what knocked him out of the race last year, cost more time. "We got it to the pits and changed the pump in 15 minutes. We've never done one quicker than 45 minutes before so the team were amazing. Then we had to catch Levi and knew we needed to put a time buffer on him because he started behind us, so I just drove as hard as possible to the finish." Levi tried his best to keep up but with the front of the car bottoming out on the bumps and after nearly nine and a half hours of racing

took third, just 25 seconds behind. The 2015 event was actually a three horse race as fourth place came in a distant 1 hour and 20 minutes later, after darkness had fallen.

Miller's troubles left Randy Slawson in his self-built Bomber to take the win by some 25 minutes, although being crowned the 'third two-time winner' had to wait a while for the stewards to deliberate what happened in the pits. Eventually the issue was decided in his favour and his otherwise faultless drive, nearly nine hours behind the wheel, was rewarded with what it deserved, the

Above: The vastness of the Hammers arena is obvious. It's a long way from anywhere

Below from left: Queueing and climbing; 2014 ULTRA4 European champion, Levi Shirley; and breaking down means self repairs

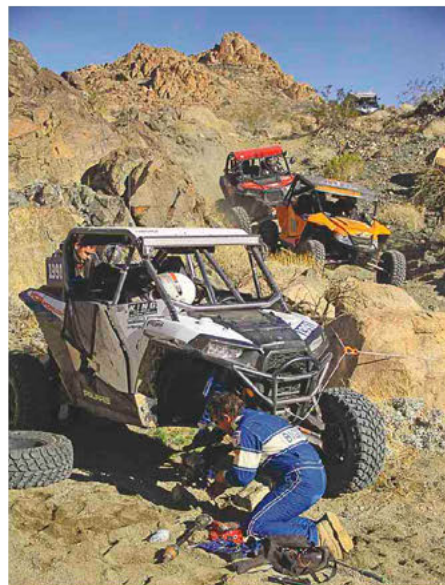
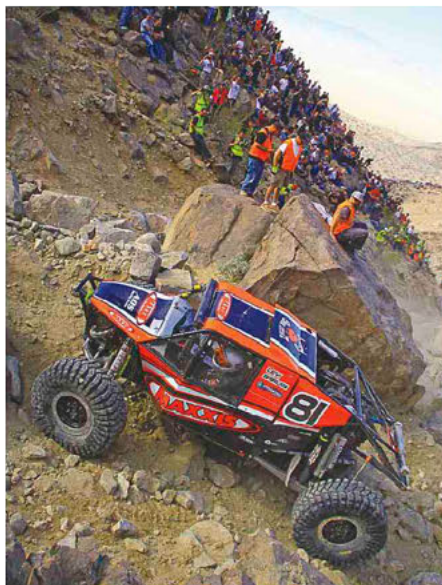
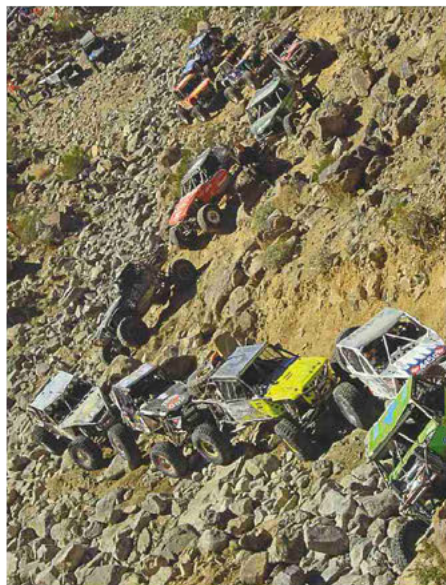
KoH sceptre.

Behind the high-profile leaders though it was a day full of heartbreak for the 114 non-finishers. Australia's Ben Napier became the second non-American to stand on the KoH podium when he won the Legends class in the EMC race on Thursday, but the main race didn't go too well. He was up as high as sixth overall until he got to Chocolate Thunder for the first time where his transfer case decided it didn't want to go any further.

After his domination of the 2014 ULTRA4 series, reigning King Loren Healy was a pre-race favourite but made a mistake trying to overtake Gilstrap and ended up off the road and 20 miles later lost four-wheel drive, which was the end of his day. Axel Burmann came over from Belgium with high hopes in the Dynamax spec class car, but faded with a three-hour wait on the way through Jackhammer, a broken exhaust valve ended his race with three cooked spark plugs.

The UK's Rob Butler, builder of Shirley's Off-Road Armoury Euro Fighter, had the favour returned when he came over two weeks before the race to rebuild Levi's old car. "All the European races feel like little sprints compared to this, it really is an endurance race. We had a great day but lost hours in Jackhammer and when we got back to the start/finish at the end of lap two, Dave told us that we had three hours until the course closed and the fastest lap so far was three and a half hours, so we retired. If I don't see any rocks for a while I will be happy but now I have some new ideas for how to improve the new car!"

The popular and wonderfully moustachioed Tom Wayes got up to 135mph on the lakebed but broke a driveshaft. Shannon Campbell had problems with an airline that meant his diff locks wouldn't work and trying to do any of the climbs with less than four ➤





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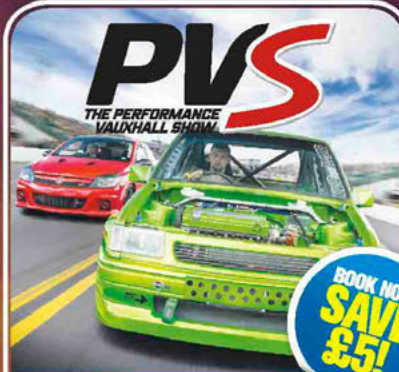


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COMPETITION

King of the Hammers



◀ wheels driving is an exercise in futility. He stopped at the bottom of Backdoor to fix it but a little further on a broken gearbox stopped him. His daughter Bailey's hope of being the first female finisher came to nothing as she ran out of time on the last lap, but flying the black and green claw mark Monster flag was son Wayland, who put in a superb and mature drive to a great fourth to beat his double champion father in KoH as well as last year's ULTRA4 championship.

Baja 1000 winner Rob MacCahren took the wheel of Larry McRae's Poison Spider Jeep, but his steep learning



Top: British honour was upheld by designer, builder, engineer and committed racer Rob Butler

Above right: 'Retro' style pick-ups were also included

Left: Shannon Campbell's diff locks failed to work, leading to some difficult climbs!

curve transitioning from rear-wheel drive Trophy Trucks to a 4x4 ULTRA4 ended when the transmission overheated thanks to a dead cooling fan. Also in a Jeep was three-time EMC winner Casey Currie but despite a great drive his introduction to the big class ended with a blown engine on lap two.

JT Taylor, locked into a heated battle with Wayes for best moustache, is the only driver to have driven in all nine KoHs and was doing pretty well getting from his starting position of 110th up to the mid-40s before parking at steep angle on Jackhammer caused an airlock in the cooling system. The overheating was terminal not long after the winching section at the top of the climb. Healy suffered something similar, having made up a lot of time by winching over a massive rock that no

one else attempted at the side of Jackhammer, but no one saw the pole sitter again after that.

One man who I don't think gets quite enough credit for what he does is organiser Dave Cole. I was listening to the comms radio all day so know all the things he had to deal with. Running the biggest and baddest off-road show in the world is a huge job and I don't think that there is anyone else who could have brought KoH and ULTRA4 to where it is today. Hats off to Dave Cole, the man who is probably the true King of the Hammers. **4x4**

Many thanks to Dave Morganthall for bouncing me around in his Jeep, Mopar for the hospitality, Emily Miller for letting me be part of the crew and especially to Shaun Bootsma for the impromptu Las Vegas road trip!

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Our 4x4s

Monthly reports on the exploits of our personal fleet of 4x4s

TOYOTA RAV4 Nigel Fryatt, Editor

Spec: Icon 2.2 T&G
Mileage: 7972
MPG: 38.5
Recent costs: None
Arrived: January 2015



FIAT PANDA CROSS Bob Cooke

Spec: 1.3 Multijet
Mileage: 2795
MPG: 46.0
Recent costs: Few car washes, getting rid of the sand!
Arrived: December 2014



MITSUBISHI PAJERO Paul Guinness

Spec: 2.8TD SWB
Mileage: 120,610
MPG: 24.1
Recent costs: None
Arrived: July 2014



TOYOTA RAV4 XT-R Sue Loy

Spec: 2-litre
Mileage: 57,774
MPG: 34
Recent costs: None
Arrived: June 2012



JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE OVERLAND Hils Everitt, Editor at Large

Spec: WK 3.0-litre
Mileage: 55,350
MPG: 30ish
Recent costs: None
Arrived: February 2014



FORD RANGER Robert Pepper

Spec: XLT
Mileage: tbc
MPG: 24.3
Recent costs: Cooper ST-Maxxes
Arrived: August 2014



BIGGER, BUT BETTER?

Toyota RAV4
Nigel Fryatt

There's no denying that you often get something of an irrational feeling about a vehicle, often for the most bizarre of reasons. My first drive with our long term Toyota RAV4 was one of those occasions that we all have to go through at times, transporting family members to the sad event of a funeral. A 250 mile round trip, when it's fair to say that your thoughts are not inclined to care much about the quality of the ride and handling, or just how economical the engine is when driven at a constant speed. It's simple; get in, get there, get home. It was, however, obvious when returning home - and since I had been the driver, finally pouring myself a large glass of red to toast my elderly relative - that I suddenly appreciated what the RAV4 is really good at; transporting people, in comfort, at a reasonable speed, without any fuss or bother.

If that sounds like damning with faint praise, it's certainly not my intention, but personally I prefer noticing a vehicle, rather than just accepting it as a mere

method of transport, and it pains me to admit that (like an awful lot of modern day SUVs) the Toyota lacks the spark that would make me part with my money to own one. It's well built, as you would expect from a Toyota. It has what for me are probably the most comfortable seats I've sat in for a long while, they seem almost bespoke to my body shape, giving just the right amount of support while being compliant and 'armchair like'. The Toyota's engine is smooth, responsive and remarkably sprightly too, should you decide to press on, but...

Inside, the latest Toyota RAV4 has in my opinion a rather odd fascia design; as if it has grown organically, rather than being thought out and planned. After all, you have to criticise a design where some of the switchgear is completely hidden from the view of the driver. Given that I am of average size (just under six feet tall) surely I should not have to dip my head to find the switches for the heated seats or the 'Sport' driving mode? I know they are there, but I still have to take my eyes off the road to actually find

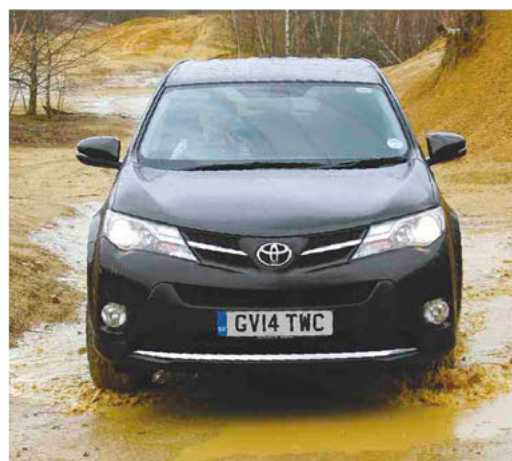


Driver's eye view means that some of the switchgear (above) is 'hidden' from my eyeline. Maybe I'm an odd shape, but it seems odder to make them difficult to actually see...



them, or just fumble about and hope. Odd, surely.

Back on the road for another long day driving to check out a potential off-road photographic venue, the Toyota was once again up to the mark. Grim, drizzly winter's driving on our motorway system is not much of a pleasure, but you do appreciate that the RAV is sure-footed and safe at speed, and at crawl, as we pressed on through the damp stuff. When we got to the venue, it coped with the off-road tour of the site, yet this is really not an off-roader in any sense of the word, which is a sad comment when you consider the original model. It looked all wrong driving around, as Sue traversed some simple obstacles while I braved the wind and rain to get some photographs. You could hear as a wheel scabbled for grip at what were very simple humps and bumps. Again that's not really a criticism, just a disappointment recognising what the RAV has developed into. Mind you, getting out of the rain and back into those excellent seats for what you knew would be a comfortable and sprightly journey home was a benefit. Of course, I needed to remember to select 'Sport' mode before I set off, rather than fumbling about blindly as we travel back down the motorway... **NF** ➤





TOUCHDOWN

Fiat Panda Cross

Bob Cooke

We touched bottom at Yarwell. By which I mean we at last found the off-road limits of the Fiat Panda Cross. Ground clearance is such an important factor in off-roading, because no matter how good the four-wheel drive system might be the car won't be going anywhere if it's perched belly-up on a rock or mound of earth. Ground clearance is something the Panda Cross doesn't have a lot of, so it's always been a matter of treading carefully whenever the little Fiat goes adventuring off-road. That's why the bottom-scraping incident came as such a surprise - it happened as we were cruising along the open plain of the assembly area at the Yarwell off-road site, which seemed quite flat and largely free of ruts, when suddenly came that dreaded crunch from somewhere underneath as we passed over the mildest of humps at the same time as one of the front wheels dipped into the mildest of hollows. Well, mild in off-road terms, in that we'd driven that

section on many occasions in other off-rovers without even noticing the bumps. Naturally we were a lot more careful than usual after that, but it proved once again how deceptive a view ahead of an off-road track can be, especially on a dull day or when the sun's high so there are few shadows to indicate the presence of irregularities.

Also quite deceptive is the way a potentially difficult obstacle can appear in an area that seems quite easy to drive. There's just such a spot on the high plateau to the east of the lake at Yarwell, an area of no particular off-road interest other than it lies on the way to more interesting sections, or that it provides an excellent viewing point when watching the more loony lads driving their Land Rovers bonnet-deep through the water. Right on the top of the plateau are a little group of depressions, ideally placed to test the cross-axle capabilities of an off-roader - but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Apart from that bottom-scraping incident, the Panda has



Top: A sand trap that didn't trap the Panda

Above: The Panda climbed well, but needed the easy way down

so far impressed mightily with its off-road prowess, particularly in the seamless way the traction control system comes into play, so smoothly at times that you can't tell it's happening. But I'd spotted a little obstacle that I reckoned would bring the Panda to its metaphorical knees. Someone had taken an earthmover to the bank on one side of the lake to dig a nice, difficult passage for cars exiting the water. On either side of that passage soft sandy earth had been piled up, and I just knew that if I tackled that at the right angle I'd get the Panda cross-axled - and there's no way its road-biased tyres would gain

traction on the soft stuff, leaving it floundering with a spinning wheel showering sand everywhere.

I was right in one respect. The wheel did spin, showering sand - but only for a moment, before steadying and dragging the Fiat further up the slope. That brought to it more soft sand where it spun again for a moment, again eventually steadying and dragging the Fiat higher up the mound. Ultimately it carried the car right up and over, surprising me but confirming both the effectiveness of the Panda Cross traction control system and that of the Goodyear Vector 4Seasons tyres - 185/65 on the Panda's 15-inch wheels. These don't look chunky

enough to cope with mud, but they do - and the relatively mild tread also helped in the soft sand, packing it down rather than digging aggressively into it.

The fact that a lad in a Land Rover had been eyeing our antics with the Panda didn't surprise me, because the bright yellow city-styled Fiat often draws glances - usually mocking at first, slowly changing to grudging admiration - when it goes off-roading among the serious mudpluggers. It was this lad who'd caught photographer Tim's attention and pointed out those axle twisters at the top of the rise. I know what he was thinking - he'd be able to laugh as he watched the Fiat floundering. I was nevertheless keen to see how the car would cope, so drove straight up there - and had to drive through the axle twisters three times so that Tim could catch it with a wheel in the air, because they didn't hinder the Fiat in the slightest, again because the traction control worked so seamlessly that from behind the wheel I couldn't tell.

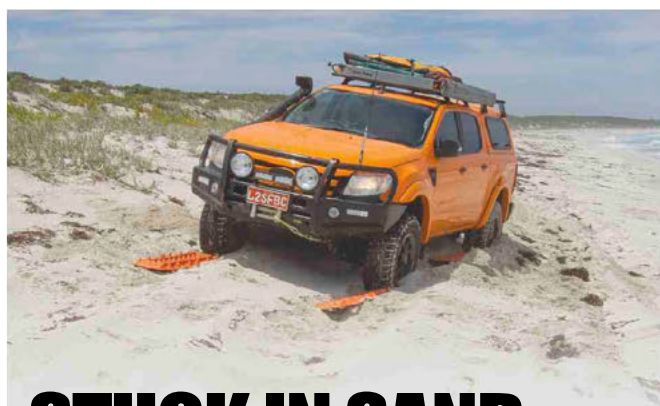
We still wanted to find something more demanding for the Panda, and fortunately there's a lot to choose from at Yarwell. I picked a variety of moderately steep, rutted gullies, hoping to use the Fiat's wheel-at-each-corner design to keep the bottom clear by straddling the ruts, even though in a couple of cases that meant riding the tyres on one or other side up the side of the gully. The car coped admirably in terms of traction, but the exercise did highlight one of the other limitations - the lack of low range gearing. Given the chance of a run at a steep incline the Fiat's Multijet turbodiesel has quite enough torque to keep it moving; however, when there are tricky

ruts, protruding rocks and roots as you're so likely to find on a climb that's been trashed into a gully by big off-roaders with chunky mud-terrains, a car as delicate as the Fiat needs to be guided gently on tickover - and it won't do it gently enough in its standard first gear. In consequence there were a few occasions on one awkward climb when I had no alternative but to slip the clutch; needless to say we stayed on the level after that.

However, having reached the top of a number of climbs, we were left with the problem of getting the Panda down again over sharp drops. On one hillock the combination of angles, ruts and humps was such that there was no way I could angle the car so it would go over on the most photogenic route without touching down on a sill, so I picked an easier way down.

The day nevertheless proved enjoyable, because the Fiat once again showed that in spite of its limitations, it's still competent enough to handle some quite serious off-road situations. That was highlighted as we waited for burgers at the catering van and the lad with the Land Rover, who turned out to be one of the course marshals, came up and said: "I've been following you around ready to recover that Fiat when it got stuck. I must say that I'm really impressed with what you've been able to do with that car today." There's a part of me that says yes, that's due to my skill and experience in knowing just how far I can push an off-roader. But there's also quite a big part that says yes, that Panda Cross really is an impressive little piece of kit. **BC**

Below: This looks to flat to lift a wheel, but the Panda didn't seem to notice



STUCK IN SAND

Ford Ranger
Robert Pepper

Over Christmas we went on a bumble for a few weeks.

This involves loading the Ranger with our camping gear, and heading off... somewhere. The destination isn't all that clear, there is a lot of, "wonder what's down here let's find out" sort of exploring, and we only really decide where to spend the night at some point in the afternoon. And our favourite type of exploring, at least here in Australia, is beach driving.

There is something quite wonderful about beaches in Oz. They are both hot and cool at the same time, beautiful, windy, interesting and generally just a pleasant place to be. I think there are two natural actions you can spend a comfortable forever just peacefully staring at - a fire, and breaking waves. But anyway, we were in a fairly isolated part of Australia so we kind of felt a bit crowded when we saw another car on the horizon, but otherwise it was rather pleasant solitude as we cruised our way west using nature's highway of sand.

Now beach driving is risky. Google and You Tube will reveal what happens when saltwater waves reach a car, and it's not pretty, nor is it recoverable. So the rule of beach driving is don't let the waves get to your car.

So there we were, bumbling along the beach, enjoying Australia as we do. Then the beach began to curve, allowing the wind a more direct path to shore. This meant bigger waves, and a steeper, softer beach. Steep beaches are very difficult to drive on as the

back tends to slip down and you crab sideways, shortly after which you are bogged. Nevertheless, we had friendly sand ruts to drive and so that helped keep things steady.

Until of course the ruts ran out, where someone had become bogged and made a mess of the ruts. Unable to tram-track, we slipped sideways and I gave up, knowing any further throttle would just dig us in further, slip us further down the beach towards the waves, or both. Golden rule of sand driving - give up early so you don't belly the car out.

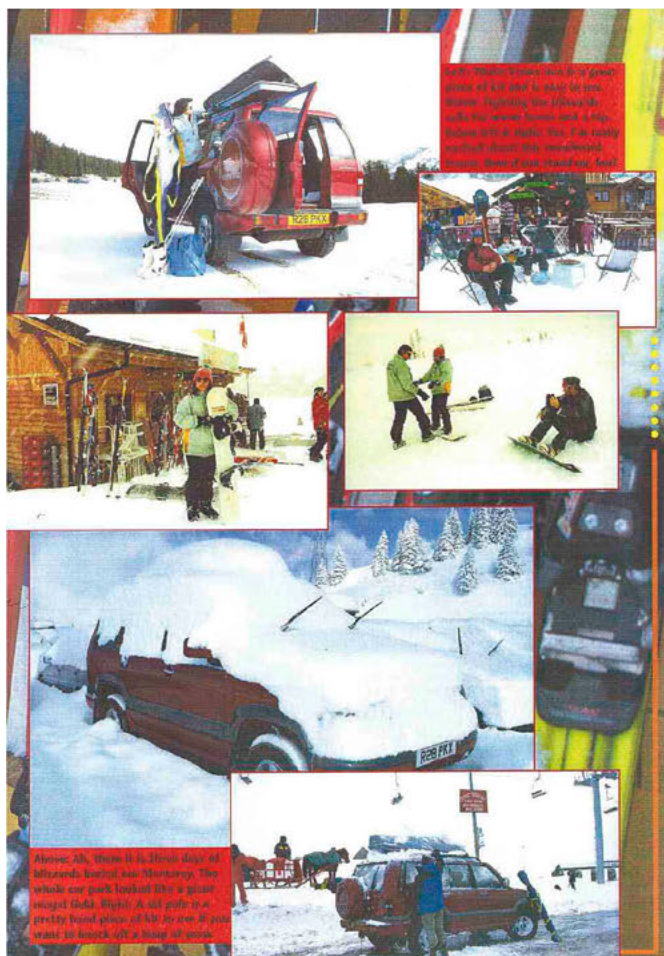
So, there we were, bogged, with unfriendly waves coming our way. Fortunately, we had a plan. Out tumbled the family and we got digging, one at each wheel to create a rut. You need to dig right down level to the base of the tyre. Then we decreased tyre pressures from 20 to 10psi, and got out four Maxtrax which, take it from me, are just about the single best item of recovery gear and the very best way to recover in sand. With everything in place we drove the Ranger onto the Matrax, and off... back into the sand. Only managed about a car length, but that was another few metres closer to safety. There's no point wheel-spinning in deeper, and when the car slows despite more throttle it's time to give up. We repeated the dig-rut-Maxtrax exercise another six or seven times, and eventually made it out of the soft, dug up area through patience and teamwork. Yes, even my nine-year-old daughter knows what to do. She earned her ice cream that day! **RP**





BAGGAGE CLAIM

Jeep Grand Cherokee Overland
Hils Everitt



This is the feature from this magazine when we went to the Alps in our long term Vauxhall Monterey. It was quite a few years ago, but it brings back great memories

make the ski drive option less attractive.

That is particularly important as, when carrying the maximum of four passengers, you can't have the rear seats down, which makes the WK's area really quite cosy in comparison to the older model and other large 4x4s. The useful thing is that my WK came with excellent roof rails which makes the whole process of fitting a roof box that much easier. Roof boxes are not that expensive, but would I want to buy one, given that we might drive to the Alps at least once a year? Storing a roof box is not that easy. I used to own a Mazda MX5 with a removable hard top. That took up loads of room, even though it was stood flat against the garage wall. The roof box is deeper and would therefore take up more space. Renting them is the other option, which may sort that problem out, and they are available at a reasonable rate.

The other big problem in recent times has been the cost of fuel. Between 10 people it isn't as much per head, compared to flights, but not all the group were that keen on the long drive. Years ago, with just two of us, we used to drive through the night when the French roads were clear, share the driving and get there early morning; check in, have a nap and then ski in the afternoon. We did this once, in the mag's long-term Vauxhall Monterey; remember those? It was great, but that was quite a few years ago when we had the energy to cope. As we've got older the thought of that night-time blitz and a short rest just doesn't compute. And our mates certainly wouldn't fancy that, so you have to factor in leaving earlier and perhaps staying overnight somewhere halfway in a cute, friendly little French village. That appeals, but is not for everybody.

Am thinking of fitting in a short trip over Easter to the Alps if the snow is still okay. Flights at peak Easter time will not be cheap and last minute deals will not be easy to come by probably. So the ski drive option may be on the cards; it would only be two of us for that, so the cargo room is not an issue. Also my Grand is fitted with Goodyear Wrangler M&S rated tyres so I probably wouldn't need to worry about snow chains. The rules are that vehicles should carry them, but my experience has been that if you drive a 4x4 with sensible rubberwear, the Gendarmes are not going to bother you... **HE**

I've just returned from my annual ski trip that I take with a group of mates. Every year we think about taking the driving option rather than flying because we've had so many delays, hanging around airports and then the horrible long wait on the coach for other transfer passengers over the years.

The last few years we have been close to opting for driving, but have been put off partly by the actual cost of it. We have enough 4x4s between us – my Jeep Grand Cherokee Overland and my mate's Land Rover Discovery 4 would get all 10 of us to the slopes with relative ease, in theory. But then we'd have to get hold of a couple of roof boxes to take four sets of skis and the extra luggage – five large bags take up a lot of room.

Actually, the only thing I don't like about my latest Grand WK, over my old WJ, is that the boot area is smaller – the old one was cavernous at 2047 litres maximum with seats down as opposed to 1909 litres (not that much, you may think, but 138 litres is the equivalent of two big expedition-style rucksacks). It's interesting that the latest Jeep Grand Cherokee WK2 comes in at a paltry 1554 litres (774 with seats up), which is very disappointing. When I decide to replace my WK and get a newer large 4x4 I have often thought that the WK2 would be the option, but that cargo area is definitely a feature that may well put me off – it would certainly

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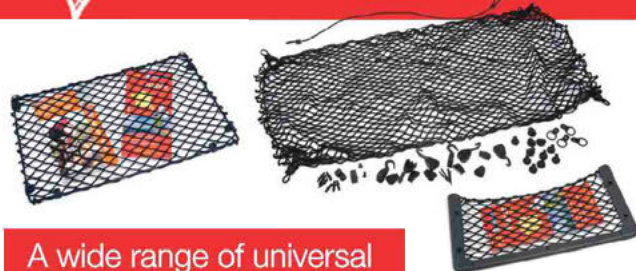
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TRAVELLING TOYOTA



After our recent Expeditions Special issue (*4x4 Magazine*, March), it was great to get this latest offering from Andy Thompson. Amusingly, Andy told us that the intention with the Toyota was 'to build a capable expedition truck that would outlive me!' When we found out more, it became clear that Andy actually has 'previous' when it comes to expeditions, having completed the famous Plymouth-Dakar charity challenge, a story we published back in 2004. We will let Andy take up the story:

"The Plymouth-Dakar trip with my Dad taught me a couple of things. One, you don't need a £30k tricked out Land Rover to travel and two, the schools in Gambia have nothing. I bought my Toyota Land Cruiser HJ60 for around £2500 and promptly took it on a trip to Kazan in Russia, as it was the easternmost point on my map of Europe! I bought it from a man in Cambridge, who bought it from the original owner, 'the teacupman'; he used it to tow a children's' teacup fairground ride.

"On returning from that trip, I started planning something more ambitious, to take a



P90: MARKET NEWS



P92: CLUB NEWS



P102: ODDBALLS

couple of Land Cruisers laden with schoolbooks and crewed by guys from my TA unit, to the Gambia to deliver books direct to schools.

"My plans were slightly interrupted by a six month tour in Iraq, but a couple of months after returning, we set off on a 6000 mile journey: four soldiers, two Land Cruisers (one only bought about one month before setting off). We finished the prep work (including blowing a rad) the night before we left. The white Land Cruiser would be sold down there, to pay for my own to return to the UK. The trip was to include around 800 miles of hard piste work through the Mauritanian Sahara. The drive down took three weeks. Always ahead of the game, we beat Top Gear by several years, managing to have the most unreliable Land Cruiser in the world! Mine was fine, but the white one broke down on what seemed like an almost daily basis! But we got there and delivered our books. The drive back took just 10 caffeine fuelled days of accidents, missed ferries and a man with a gun explaining how we had in fact only paid for one tyre!

"After that, the Land Cruiser continued to do sterling service including driving to Belarus, where the first time I met my now wife's family.

"After about six years of my not so tender ownership it was starting to struggle and rot away. I had a choice, rebuild it, or do the sensible thing and sell it and move on to something else... so I rebuilt it. I was far too emotionally attached by this time to see it go.

"The complete rebuild was over a period of three years by a local garage – actually Waveney Land Rover in Norfolk who, who having done all my previous trip prep, swallowed their pride and agreed to work on something other than a Land Rover. The plan was a simple rescue job, didn't have to be too tidy, just arrest the rot so it would last another 20 years, but of course, that's not how these things work.

"It ended as a body off, complete bare metal restoration, which included new front wings, four doors, and upper tailgate, a replacement lower tailgate, various bits of chrome, rubber seals etc, and a new rear carpet. The chassis was sandblasted and painted in chip resistant chassis paint, and all cavities were wax oiled to within an inch of their life!

"The future? Well I'm starting to think about fitting a 4.2-litre engine from the 80 Series..."

This is exactly the kind of vehicle for Your 4x4 Life. And what a life! Great story and an excellent looking truck. What's your story? Do let us know - ED.



Andy's trip to the Gambia was not without drama. While his truck (left) was fine, the second model (seen here in white), broke down most days – but it got there! On his return, the restoration of the Toyota began!

CALL FOR 4X4S!

This is the section of the magazine for your 4x4. We have had a great variety of 4x4s sent in to us over the months, ranging from rebuilt Wranglers, immaculate Fiat Pandas, hard-working Land Cruisers and some wild and wonderful pick-ups. We want to hear from more of you. Tell us about your 4x4, whether it's modified or completely standard, new or very old, just send us in a few pictures and details of your vehicle, when you bought it and what it is that makes it the ideal 4x4 for you. We have a limited number of smart 4x4 Magazine Polo shirts which we will be sending to owners of vehicles featured, so include your address and shirt size!

You can email some details and pictures to 4x4.ed@kelsey.co.uk or write to us at: The Editor, Your 4x4 Life, 4x4 Magazine, Kelsey Media, Cudham Tithe Barn, Cudham, Kent, TN16 3AG.

Looking forward to hearing from you, after all... it's Your 4x4 Life.

Nigel Fryatt, Editor

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Marketwatch

MONTHLY 4x4 PRICE REVIEW



registered. Most of those were fleet cars, and since fleet operators traditionally renew their fleets after three years, it means a significant influx of mostly good-condition three-year old used cars flooding secondhand dealerships - inevitably driving prices down.

DOWNWARD TREND

It's difficult to pinpoint the precise reason for some market trends. In the UK it's become traditional for demand for 4x4s to peak in the months before winter, just as cabriolets come to the fore during the spring, but over the past few years some 4x4 values appear to have held through the year simply because SUVs are considered the cars to be seen in, regardless of the weather or any off-road requirement. However, there appears to have been a dip in the prices being paid for 4x4s at auction, which could at last reflect a general downward trend in second-hand prices. For instance at a recent Brightwells sale a batch of six Land Rover Discoverys - usually commanding bids right on or over book value - failed to average 85 per cent, including one where bidding didn't reach half of its book value. Similarly Range Rovers and Range Rover Sport prices have eased, two that bucked the trend by exceeding 90 per cent of book value were low-mileage cars, a high-specification 2007 Range Rover Sport 2.7 TDV6 HSE, under 60,000 miles, which went for £15,500, and a pristine 2009 3.0TDV6 with 72,000 miles that sold for £21,700.

With a few notable exceptions bids for a whole range of 4x4s including double cab pick-ups seemed lower than in previous months, which has seen a number of cars failing to meet their reserve, such as the brace of 2005 Volkswagen Touaregs that appeared at three consecutive auctions without selling, though that's possibly because they were the less desirable low-powered 2.5 TDi versions.

Exceptions to the rule included a couple of Honda CR-V SE Sports that went for over book price (£2100 for a silver '02 with under 70,000 miles) and surprisingly an '02 Land Rover Defender that went for an impressive £8600 (156 per cent of book) though it had been well prepared and accessorised. Smart purchase of the day was the bright orange 2012 Kia Sportage 2.0 CRDi KX-3 with under 9000 miles that sold for £15,500 (we've seen higher mileage versions going for over £20,000) while the not-so-sure purchase was the £1050 paid for a 1989 Land Rover 90 with 144,000 miles, replaced bulkhead and fitted tow bar, not bad until you realise it was a non-runner. Having said that, non-runners are always worth looking at because they (generally) go for peanuts and if you're handy with a spanner even allowing for the cost of repair you could end up with a good car for a wallet-friendly price.

Power points

Whether it's the weather, or growing interest in alternative-fuelled vehicles, or simply because used car dealerships are awash with cars, but as Bob Cooke explains, auction prices of used 4x4s at last appear to be easing

News that the government is throwing over £40 million at boosting interest in low emission vehicle technology should be welcomed by anyone seeking a sensibly-priced second-hand 4x4. Not that this initiative will cut the cost of conventional 4x4 driving, but it must eventually drive down values of used 4x4s. The lure of low-cost motoring courtesy of a mixture of Government grants, low road tax, freedom from congestion charges and, of course, reduced or zero reliance on hydrocarbon fuels is already strong enough to see electric vehicles and hybrids taking some three per cent of the total UK car market, the take-up of plug-in car grants having risen fourfold in 2014, compared to the previous year. It's also fair to say that percentage would be a lot higher if motorists felt more confident of finding somewhere to charge an EV if caught short away from home.

The Government's Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) handout also includes a significant incentive for drivers who don't venture far from home but have been put off buying an electric car - already an expensive outlay - by the added cost of installing a high-current charging point at home. There's a £15 million pot to continue the Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme which will give ULEV drivers a grant of up to £700 towards installation on a home charging point; that's as well as £8 million to support the provision of public charging points across the UK.

This is all going on against a backdrop of continuing growth in new car sales in the UK - for a record-breaking 36 consecutive months. Even during February, traditionally one of the quietest months ahead of a number plate change in March, sales went up 12 per cent year-on-year with 76,958 new cars



Good value low-miles Sportage for £15,500



Top money for a well-tweaked workhorse...

FOCUS ON: Honda CR-V

GO FOR: 2.2 i-DTEC SE

AIM TO PAY: £20,000

The only odd thing about the Honda CR-V is that it's kept the R-V suffix even though it long ago morphed from its original estate-like Recreational Vehicle format into a luxurious city car with no off-road pretensions in its design and precious little off-road ability in its mechanical make-up, in spite of its sophisticated four-wheel drive system. Hence if you're thinking of buying a CR-V as an off-road plaything you'll be looking at one of the vintage 1997-2002 models, and while you're at it find one that has the on-board shower so you can wash the mud off your boots. An early one still in reasonable condition shouldn't cost more than £500, pay as much as £1000 if it's been really well looked after and the mileage is reasonable.

Meanwhile losing the off-road image hasn't dented the more modern CR-V's popularity, reflected in the fact that the previous (from 2007) generation was the most sought-after second-hand SUV in 2012, not to mention the 2.0 i-VTEC being voted the most reliable car of 2014. The replacement model for 2012 improved on the formula with better ride comfort, better roadholding and more interior space. The only complication for buyers has been the bewildering choice of variants to choose from, including the availability of front-drive-only models.

At launch the choice of engines was limited to the smooth and lively 150bhp 2.2 i-DTEC turbodiesel engine offering up to 50mpg consumption or the 155-horse 2.0 i-VTEC petrol engine, theoretically capable of returning better than 38mpg in some versions. With the six-speed manual both engines feature stop-start technology; the automatic is a conventional five-speeder.

Innovative high-tech features include 'motion adaptive' electric power steering, which adjusts from light response when parking to a firmer feel with increased feedback and sharper response when driving at speed, while also linking with the electronic stability control to actively prompt the driver to steer the right way in slippery conditions.

All versions are very well equipped, even the entry level S has alloy wheels, climate control, cruise control, electric windows and electric door mirrors. The SE adds auto-dipping headlamps, roof rails and a DAB digital stereo, luxury upgrades in the SR include leather upholstery and the range-topping EX had a panoramic sunroof, keyless entry and electric adjustment for the driver's seat. Expect to pay around £10,000 for a clean 2012 example with high mileage, closer to £13,000 if the mileage is low, Belgrave Motor Company of Sheffield (01142 561100) were offering a pristine one-owner pearlescent white 80,000-mile 2.0 i-VTEC with full service history for £13,480 with a free RAC warranty. Optional on the EX was the £900 'sensing' pack which includes adaptive cruise control with collision mitigating brakes, forward collision warning, lane keep assist and traffic sign recognition. The EX has satnav as standard, look out for the 'navi' versions of other trim grades, which had the satnav as pay-for extra. Look out for Black Edition and White Edition specials of 2014, these originally added nearly £800 worth of extra equipment at no extra cost, features including the 19-inch Orion alloys and privacy glass.

During 2013 the 120-horse 1.6 i-DTEC turbodiesel was introduced, but only in two-wheel drive versions - this engine, now uprated to 160bhp, had replaced the 2.2 i-DTEC altogether in the 2015 facelifted model and therefore can be specified with the 4x4 transmission.

The arrival of the facelifted version has prompted many dealers to offer their year-old demonstrators for sale at attractive prices, ranging from £18,000 for an S version with under 10,000 miles to over £30,000 for an SR or EX - take note that a year-old demonstrator may not appear cheap when simply comparing the asking price with the list price of a similar new model, but that's almost certainly because the demonstrator will have been upgraded with worthwhile options, so check the exact specs of any car you're thinking of buying and shop around for one with the features you'd prefer. Chiswick Honda, (0208 226 3255) for example, were offering a 2014 2.2 i-DTEC SR with 3600 miles for £33,000, with upgrades including metallic alabaster silver paint and HDD satnav, and a 6000-mile 2.0 i-VTEC EX in metallic white for £32,000.



Buying Guide Archive

What are you looking for?

We have run a number of detailed **Buyers' Guides**, useful if you are thinking of changing your 4x4, or buying for the first time. **Back Issues** are available by calling 0845 872 7385 or online at: www.4x4i.com

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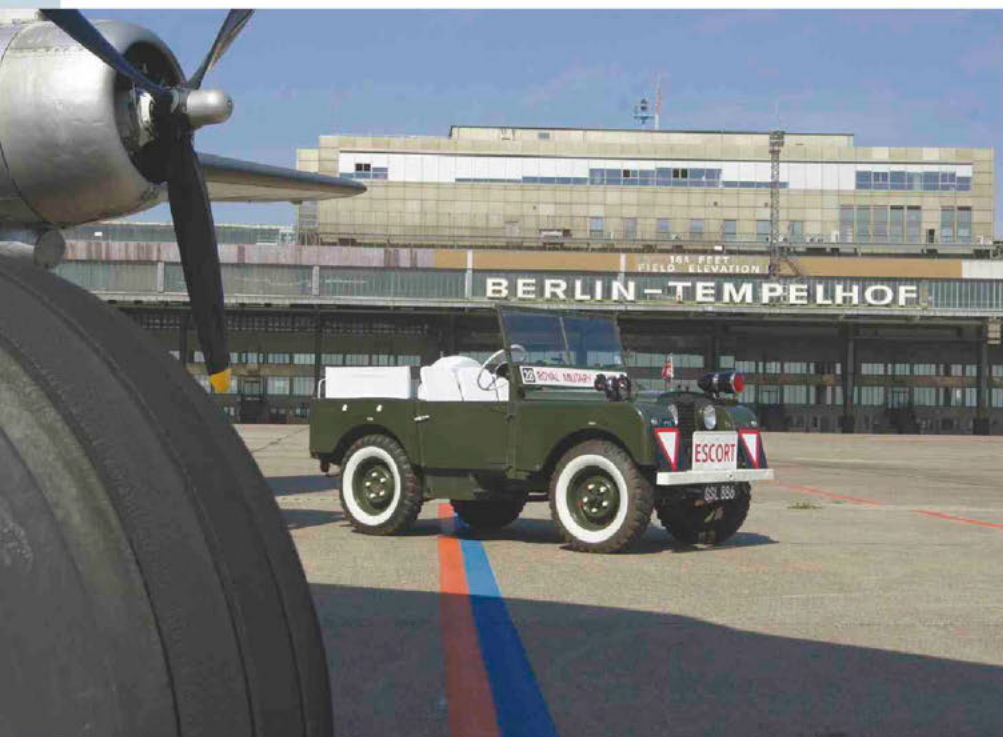
Range Rover v Mercedes-Benz ML
Issue November 2012

Seven-seater SUVs
Issue March 2014

Club World

MONTHLY CLUB ACTION

What's your club doing? *Louise Limb* goes clubbing to find out what is happening in the 4x4 Club World. If your club has news or forthcoming events it would like us to promote, then just email: 4x4.ed@kelsey.co.uk - marking your message **Club News**



of the Wall (pictured left). If the local German classic Land Rover owners thought her mad to have driven from England, the temporary hitch of a head gasket replacement was overcome when Dunsfold had the necessary parts sent to 'the field' by the next day.

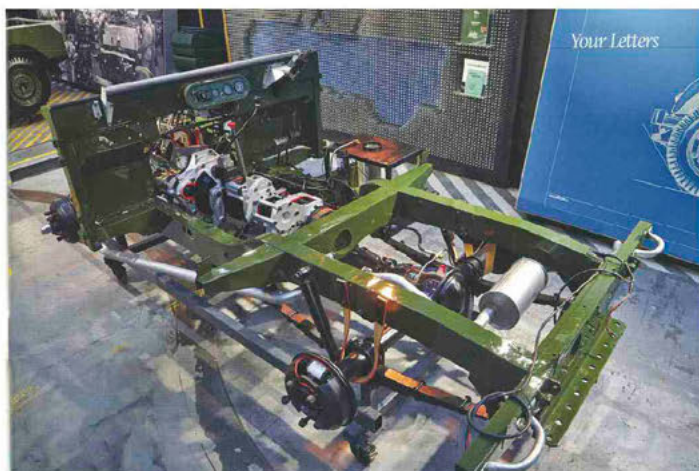
In August 2014, three intrepid Series Land Rovers made the journey from Nimes to Morocco. Yves de Mestral, an LRSOC member from Switzerland joined two friends from French Series Land Rover club Le Temp Des Series, in their Series I and II vehicles to explore the Atlas mountains, taking in Roman ruins, local colour and scorpions... unfortunately, Yves' 1957 Series I, Le P'tit Bleu destroyed its rear wheel bearings after about 300km of mountain track driving and 'African Style' repairs helped it limp along a little further, a recovery truck taking it the final 900km back to the ferry at Tangier. It wouldn't be an adventure in classic motoring without a breakdown!

Series Ones see the world

FRESH OFF THE press and fragrant, issue 181 of Legend visits Land Rover Series One Club members from as far away as New Zealand, Germany, Malta and Morocco, as well as bringing us news that Land Rover have recreated its first production line from 1948 as part of a major new exhibition at the Lode Lane, Solihull factory (pictured below and

reported in last month's issue), created under the expert guidance of Dunsfold's Land Rover historian, restorer and curator, Phil Bashall.

Meanwhile, Sue Cummings had reason to thank Phil Bashall when driving her 80in the 1959 miles to Berlin and back for Berlin Patrol, the 20th anniversary commemoration of the Allies handing back Berlin after the dismantling



Dunsfold News

WITH PHIL BASHALL still in the spotlight, following the great news in December that the Dunsfold Collection had achieved charitable status, fundraising is getting underway to secure a museum building to house the unique current collection of 134 prototype, pre-production, landmark and other special Land Rovers. Together with 2000 models, engineering drawings, marketing and promotional material, manuals and handbooks, the collection is looking safe for the future with the support of Jaguar Land Rover. At present the collection is housed in an assortment of barns and can only be seen at the biennial open weekend.

Dunsfold's vehicles sometimes appear at very special events as the Series IIA Ceremonial vehicle did when Roger Jones, an active Friend of the Collection and curator of the REME Museum Vehicle Branch at Bordon where the IIA is stored, drove actor Idris Elba to the podium at the opening of the Invictus Games in 2014 where he would read the Victorian Invictus poem, which an imprisoned Nelson Mandela had pinned to his cell wall. 30XC16 is one of two Ceremonial Series IIAs in the Collection, both built in 1968 and issued to the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR) and converted in the early 1970s to their current state, this one adapted for a standing passenger in the rear. Painted gloss black with chromed military bumpers and windscreen surround, and those hubcaps came from a VW Beetle, with caps to cover the VW lettering.

Dunsfold considers new vehicles all the time and the 500,000th Range Rover slipped into Phil's hands recently when the owner rang asking what it was worth. The May 2002, Epsom Green Vogue 4.4 V8 it is a third generation Range Rover and was driven off the production line by England goalkeeper and self confessed Range Rover enthusiast, David Seaman, who had ordered it from the Chipperfield Land Rover dealership in Kings Langley and kept it for three years. With just 52,000 miles on the clock and full main dealer service history it has been used to the cossetting it will continue to receive.

The next open weekend with all manner of entertainments will be on 13th and 14th June 2015 at Springbok Estate GU6 8EX. Details from the website, www.dunsfoldcollection.co.uk/open-days.



Jersey Land Rover Owners Club

WHEREVER THERE ARE Land Rovers there are clubs dedicated to the marque and the island of Jersey is no exception! JLOC host their own events on the island and attend shows and off road events in the UK and France. According to their web site some

members even made it as far as Yorkshire in October 2014. The club meets at The Priory, Devils Hole on the first Monday of every month. Contact them for more details at www.jloc.org.je/ Photographs are courtesy of Jimmy Gray, Jon B and JLOC.



North Lakes 4x4 Club - open to all!

THE NORTH LAKES 4x4 Club is Cumbria's all marque club catering for everyone from the fiercely competitive to the weekend family camper. Whether you've a fully modified Land Rover or a well used Nissan Terrano, you'll be most welcome a range of off road competitive events from Tyro to Challenge. North Lakes 4x4 link up other local clubs such as the Cumbria Rovers Owners Club for trials and other events such as the Challenge event coming up over the first weekend in May. With exciting venues like Plumpton and a backdrop of the Lake District what more could you want, except perhaps a 4x4! Find out more at www.nl4x4.co.uk/



Let's Go Off-Road

WHERE TO GO TO ENJOY YOUR 4X4

Pay and Play Sites

Here are some of the best places to go off-road in the UK. We would always advise that you call to check dates and times. If you have a site that ought to be included, email us on 4x4.ed@kelsey.co.uk and mark your email **4x4 PAY AND PLAY**

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Green laning trips from one day to two weeks. Start and finish close to Penrith (access from M6 Jct. 40). A day long tour of the lanes and tracks in and around the Lake District National Park. Standard vehicles with road tyres will be able to complete this whole day. £45 per vehicle. Contact for details or to book. Email: Lakes@4x4Safari.co.uk or call: 07711 231417. Facebook page: 4x4Safari.

ASH 4X4

Ash 4x4 Ltd have a Pay and Play site at Chirk Quarry, LL14 5AH, near Shrewsbury. Check the website as the venue may vary between Hawkstone Park and Chirk Quarry. There are no toilets, food or other amenities, just very good off-roading. Call Billy Hilton on 07581 030331 or go to the website: www.ash4x4.com

AVALANCHE ADVENTURE

Run by Avalanche Adventure, this venue is at Sibbercroft, near Market Harborough. Pay and Play days and other 4x4/off-road activities. Give them a call on 01858 880613 or look for more details on: www.avalancheadventure.co.uk

BALA OFFROAD LLANNERCH YR ERYR

The Llannerch yr Eryr farm and off-road site is a very popular and well-known pay and play site. Spectacular views over Bala lake and surrounding mountains. Always ring to check the weather in the winter months. £30 a day, £20 after 1pm. Call: 07850 800709. www.balaoffroad.co.uk

BLUE LIGHT OFF ROAD CLUB

This off-road club operates in southern England, and is open to all 4x4s. Prices vary, but is usually £45 per vehicle and the Pay and Play site is often at the Army Training area at Bagshot, Surrey. Go to: www.bluelightoffroadclub.co.uk or contact John Amos on 07805 656947 or email: blorc@hotmail.com

BOXGROVE 4X4

Boxgrove 4x4, Tinwood Lane, Boxgrove, near Chichester, West Sussex. Huge 80-acre site of mud, gravel tracks and woodland. Catering and toilets. £25 per vehicle. Quads are welcome, £15 per rider, all riders must be 16+ and there's a 10mph speed limit. Call: 01903 812195 or 07802 582826. Email: johnmorgan@4x4driving.co.uk www.4x4driving.co.uk

DEVIL'S PIT

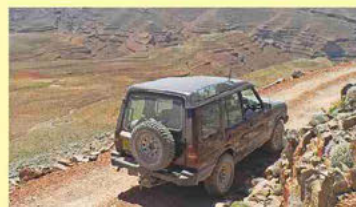
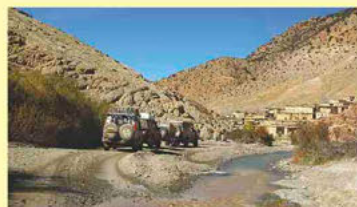
Devil's Pit is 60 acres of different courses (novice, experienced and expert) at Barton-Le-Clay, Nr Luton, MK45 4LG (A6) Bedfordshire (OS Grid ref: TL078297). £26 per vehicle. Children (under 16) are free. Toilets and catering, first aid and recovery facilities. Tel: 01582 883349. Email: devils.pit@virgin.net www.devilspit.co.uk

ESSEX, ROCHFORD & DISTRICT 4X4

Essex, Rochford & District 4x4 Club have a 4x4 site located on Creeksea Ferry Road, Canewdon, Essex, open on the second Sunday of every month for both members and non-members, check out: www.4x4er.co.uk

2015 WAYPOINT TOURS

The guys at Waypoint Tours have sent through the company's 2015 schedule, and it makes interesting reading. One of the great things about the Waypoint Trips is that as well as being able to travel to some very interesting remote places with your 4x4, ably guided by experts, you also know that each night when you camp, you can relax while someone else does the cooking, since all meals are included on a Waypoint Tour. You should check out the website, but as an example, how about the High Atlas and Sahara Desert trip, which offers 15 fully catered days in Morocco. This comprises the very best of diverse Morocco. You will travel over the Rif Mountains and through the Cedar forests, then southward across the High Atlas and on down to the Sahara Desert. Explore the wild Anti Atlas en route to Marrakech, where we overnight in the tranquillity of a luxurious authentic riad. Sounds like a must to us. To find out more go to www.waypoint-tours.com or email Barrie on mail@waypoint-tours.com and remember to say 4x4 Magazine sent you. Waypoint also do trips closer to home, including greenlaning, so keep an eye on our detailed calendar to catch the dates.



UK EVENTS DIARY

APRIL

5/6

PAY AND PLAY DAYS

HAMPSHIRE Thames Valley 4x4 Club Hogmoor, Bordon event. Camping available on Saturday at £10 per camping unit (tent/caravan) for the weekend. Burger van, toilets and power wash on site, please bring 20-litres of water for the wash. Easter egg hunt on both Sunday and Monday. Cost will be £25 members, £30 non members. For more details: www.tv4x4.co.uk

5

PAY AND PLAY DAYS

GWYNEDD Bala Off Road Llannerch yr Eyr
LEICESTERSHIRE Avalanche Adventure
WEST SUSSEX Boxgrove 4x4
SOUTH YORKSHIRE Frickley Off-road Centre

12

ORGANISED DRIVE NORTH WALES

Landcraft 4x4 Snowdonia Adventure Drives. Excellent organised drives through some great lanes in Snowdonia, only available on an organised drive like this. Call

David Mitchell of Landcraft 4x4 on 01678 520820 or check out: www.landcraft4x4.co.uk

19

PAY AND PLAY DAYS LEICESTERSHIRE

Avalanche Adventure
SOUTH YORKSHIRE Frickley Off-road Centre

ORGANISED DRIVE

NORTH WALES Landcraft 4x4 Snowdonia Adventure Plus Drives. Excellent organised drives through some great lanes in Snowdonia, only available on an organised drive like this. You will need a vehicle designed for serious off-road use; off-road tyres, recovery points. You may well get stuck! Serious off-roaders please. Call David Mitchell of Landcraft 4x4 on 01678 520820 or check out: www.landcraft4x4.co.uk

25/26

ORGANISED DRIVE WILTSHIRE

Waypoint Tours Fancy a greenlaning trip that includes cooked breakfast, evening BBQ and two lunches? Check out the website for more details, or email Barrie on mail@waypoint-tours.com www.waypoint-tours.com

We aim to make this feature the most comprehensive off-road events' calendar published, and you have to admit, there are a lot of events listed here! However, we know we can do better, but need to hear from you, your club, association or travel company. If you are planning something, send us the details and a couple of pictures and we will highlight your event, off-road day, expedition or weekend jolly in these pages. Just send to 4x4.ed@kelsey.co.uk mark the subject of the email: **4x4 CALENDAR**

25 PAY AND PLAY DAYS COUNTY DURHAM

Kirton Off-road Centre

26 PAY AND PLAY DAYS WEST SUSSEX COUNTY DURHAM

Slindon Safari

Kirton Off-road Centre

25/26 PAY AND PLAY DAYS BEDFORDSHIRE

Devil's Pit

This weekend at the Devil's Pit is in association with Muddy Good Weekend @ Shuttleworth. For discounted tickets visit: www.activeshows.co.uk

COUNTRY DURHAM ORGANISED DRIVE DORSET AND EAST DEVON

Kirton Off Road Centre

4x4 Adventure Tours

Organised drive across routes not open to the general public. Contact Tom on 07769336099 or go to www.4x4adventuretours.co.uk/ booking. £60 per vehicle, per day

MAY

1 JUNE ISSUE OF 4X4 MAGAZINE ON SALE!

Spring is definitely on the way – since we are having a look at what

is available this year for those of us that enjoy our camping! Full review of the camping market. Plus the Jeep Renegade arrives in the UK, we take a look at remould tyres, and just what you need to do with that hi lift jack. All this and much more in the June issue. Check out page 78 for the very latest details on our great subscription offers.

3/4 PAY AND PLAY DAYS HAMPSHIRE

Thames Valley 4x4 Club
Two-day event with camping available on the Saturday. Costs £25 for members, £30 for non-members. For more details go to: www.tv4x4.co.uk

3 PAY AND PLAY DAYS GWYNEDD LEICESTERSHIRE

Bala Off Road
Llannerch yr Eyr

Avalanche Adventure
SOUTH YORKSHIRE
Frickley Off-road Centre

10 PAY AND PLAY DAYS WEST SUSSEX

Boxgrove 4x4

17 PAY AND PLAY DAYS BEDFORDSHIRE LEICESTERSHIRE SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Devil's Pit

Avalanche Adventure

Frickley Off-road Centre

FRICKLEY OFF-ROAD CENTRE

Frickley Off-Road Centre is near Doncaster in South Yorkshire, DN5 7BU and includes climbs, hollows, woodland and rock climbs suitable for the novice to the experienced off-roader. £25 per vehicle, all road-legal 4x4s welcome. Call Charlie: 07836 544335
Email: offroad@frickley4x4.co.uk www.frickley4x4.co.uk

HARBOUR HILL

Harbour Hill, near Aldermaston A340. Non-members £30 (£10 membership, £20 for the day). Wheel washing, catering and toilets available. Call: 07887 533168 Email: withoutaclub@yahoo.co.uk
www.4x4-withoutaclub.co.uk

KIRTON OFF ROAD CENTRE

Kirton Off Road Centre is a massive 600 acre site near Kirton Lyndsey, Lincolnshire, DN21 4JH. Standard days are £40, and there are often camping weekends at £75 inclusive. Check their website or call for more details. Call Paul: 07907 450974 Email: paul@korc.co.uk
www.kirtonoffroadcentre.co.uk

LANDCRAFT

Offering the chance to get to some superb parts of Snowdonia, David Mitchell's experienced outfit offer some great Adventure drives, and for those more adventurous, there's always Adventure Plus. Paying on the day is £60 (inc VAT), pre-book and save £10. Call 07831 258864
Email: info@landcraft.co.uk www.landcraft4x4.co.uk

MUDDY BOTTOM 4X4

The Muddy Bottom 4x4 site is located in the heart of the New Forest (postcode SO43 7FL). All pay and play days have an entry fee of £25, and you need to be a member (day membership is only £1, or annual membership £10). The site has a jet wash, burger van, picnic area and free recovery. Please note that no kinetic ropes are permitted on site, and that you will have to jet wash your vehicle before you leave to avoid leaving any mud on the roads. To find out more contact Carla 07754 940783 or 07801 088203. Email: muddybottom4x4@aol.com
www.muddybottom4x4.com

PARKWOOD 4X4 (TONG)

Parkwood is at Tong village, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD4 0RR. Open 10-4pm, catering, toilets, first aid, vehicle wash, £35.00 per vehicle including passengers - providing that there are correct fitting seatbelts. Call: 0113 285 4356 Email: info@parkwood4x4.co.uk
www.parkwood4x4.co.uk

SILVERDALE

Explore this site at Haying Wood, Silverdale, Stoke-on-Trent, ST5 6QQ which has 53 acres of steep wooded tracks, water holes and mud! £25 per vehicle. Open from 10am until 4pm, road taxed vehicles. Tel 07970 286881. Email: exploreeoffroad@hotmail.com
www.exploreeoffroad.com

SLINDON SAFARI

Slindon Safari, near Arundel, West Sussex, 10am until 4pm; £30 per vehicle, £3 spectators, Quads welcome, £10, all riders 16+ and there's a 10mph speed limit. Routes for beginners and more advanced. Call: 01903 812195 or 07802 582826
Email: johnmorgan@4x4driving.co.uk www.4x4driving.co.uk

TRANS PENNINE OFF ROAD EVENTS

Club runs Pay and Play sites at various venues in Derbyshire including Holymoorside, near Chesterfield, S42 7EG; Biggin Quarry, Ashborne, DE6 1QU and Padley Wood Farm, S45 8EL. Gates open at 9.00am and costs are £20 per vehicle. Catering and toilet facilities.
Email: events@tpore.co.uk Check out: www.tpore.co.uk

OCTOBER SPANISH 4X4 FESTIVAL

Warm sunshine, great tapas, a few cervezas and some 40 miles of off-road tracks – what's not to like?! Spain's Les Comes 4x4 Festival takes place at Suria, which is close to Barcelona, over the 14/15th October and so we thought worth letting you know well in advance to book your holiday! From the pictures it is easy to appreciate that this is a full-on 4x4 event. There's a big trade area, a Dakar Zone, an Extreme 4x4 section, a beginners circuit, plus camping and children's activities. Last year's event had 800 4x4 vehicles and around 5000 people. This year they are restricting it to only 900 4x4s, so if you are interested in visiting, it is probably a good idea to contact the organiser Toni Ventura pretty quickly. You can email for more details on toniventura@lescomes.com, or check out the website on www.lescomes.com



GRAND FINALE

The Grand Vitara may have given way to a smarter, smoother newcomer, but the veteran Suzuki still has value as a family car with true off-road ability

TARGET RANGE: £3000 - £20,000



Just as the Grand Vitara seamlessly replaced the original Vitara in 1998, a new Vitara has arrived to replace the Grand Vitara. The new Vitara is safer and much more efficient than the Grand Vitara, but it's also considerably smaller, so while anyone wishing to buy a modern compact SUV might consider a new Vitara as an alternative to, say, a Nissan Juke or a Vauxhall Mokka, there's still good reason why an adventurous family might prefer the more spacious - not to mention more off-road-capable - Grand Vitara. The original Grand Vitara was not the most refined of vehicles, but succeeded because it met its design brief as a logical step up for the young-at-heart enthusiasts who had so enjoyed the boy-racer Vitara and needed to move up into a more practical family car, yet one that offered similarly competent off-road capability. The rough edges

were honed away for the all-new car for the 2005 model year, which brought the Suzuki more in line with key rivals with improved style, much better refinement and a more comfortable, capacious interior, though it retained the dual-personality approach of having a racier-styled three-door alternative to the more mainstream five-door estate, neatly appealing to younger buyers as well as family users. The new model did away with the separate ladder-frame chassis, opting instead for a lighter unitary body with integral underfloor reinforcement. This made it stiffer, combining with the all-independent suspension to give it a more comfortable and refined quality of ride, while losing none of its off-road ability. Safety features were also improved, all models incorporating side and curtain airbags as well as airbags for driver and passenger.

The engine choice was interesting in

view of the moderate 1600cc capacity of the new Vitara; the 2005 model featured a 1600cc 16-valve petrol engine in the three-door, though with only 105bhp compared with the 118bhp of the modern Vitara engine. Fortunately the heavier five-door was equipped with a 2.0-litre petrol engine, developing an adequate 126bhp, and this could be chosen with a five-speed manual or a four-speed automatic. All versions had four-wheel drive, a more advanced system than the simple selectable arrangement in the old Vitara. It is a permanent system in that drive is normally directed to the rear wheels - it's an oddball arrangement in an era when most compact cars have transverse-mounted engines driving the front wheels - while a torque-sensing limited slip centre differential adds drive to the front wheels if a rear wheel loses traction. Oddly, although the three-door is styled for fun and adventure, a





petrol-engined version isn't the best choice as an off-road funster because it doesn't have low-range gearing. Turbodiesel versions have the same drive train as the five-door which does have low range, with a dash-mounted turnwheel that allows the centre diff to be locked and low range to be selected.

The DDiS turbodiesel became available in the five-door for the 2006 model year; this was a Renault-sourced common-rail unit with similar power to the 2.0-litre petrol engine, but more low-rev torque. The three-door gained turbodiesel power from 2007.

The first major upgrade was during 2009 when the turbodiesel engine was worked over to improve its efficiency, returning a claimed 41.5mpg in the five-door, compared with the 36.7mpg of the original, and CO2 emissions of 179g/km rather than the original engine's 205g/km. At the same time the

The Suzuki Grand Vitara's versatility was in part due to the fact that there were both three and four door models, thereby appealing to both family and 'single' owners

2.0-litre petrol engine was replaced by a more powerful and smoother-revving 2.4-litre unit, which had its refinement enhanced by a balancer shaft. An Electronic Stability Programme was also introduced to all versions.

This was followed by a 'facelift' during 2010 which proved to be more of a nip and tuck to the rear - the advertising blurb referred to the latest models having a cleaner and more sophisticated bodyline at the rear giving the Grand Vitara a more urban look together with a 200mm reduction in overall length.' What it actually meant was that they'd removed the tailgate-mounted spare - resulting in the 200mm reduction in length - and replaced it with 'a tyre repair sealant and inflationary device.' Obviously buyers looking at a car of this age will need to balance the lack of a spare against the possibility of buying an older car with a proper spare.

Perhaps the oddest development of all was the reinstatement of a 'proper' spare wheel for the facelift for 2013 - a temporary-use tyre on a steel wheel, not much use as a replacement for a mud terrain tyre damaged on an off-roading outing. This final upgrade, aimed obviously at improving the car's image to ensure continued popularity before the model went out of production, saw new front and rear bumpers and a slightly revised interior with new seat trims and a more sophisticated infotainment system.

OUR VERDICTS

We were somewhat ambivalent about the new Grand Vitara on our first encounter. In our December 2005 issue our debut report on the car praised the tidier, sleeker styling and smarter, more comfortable interior but bemoaned the mediocre performance from the lacklustre engines. It may, even 10 years ago, have been an emissions



BUYING USED

Suzuki Grand Vitara

◀ thing but the lustier 155-horse 2.5 V6 wasn't officially imported to the UK. We said of the seemingly advanced VVT (variable valve timing) 1.6 16v engine in the 3-door: 'Although initially free-revving and lending a nippiness to what is a daily runabout, it feels more like a 1200cc, with the 105bhp struggling to peak at 5900rpm, and the lowly 107lb ft of torque reflected in a harsh tone through the revs.' We were no more excited by the 2.0-litre engine in the 5-door: 'Thankfully this has more refined acoustics, but propelling the extra weight of the 5-door it feels noticeably underpowered and, shown an incline, labours to find all its 138 horses.' Horses for courses, as ever, since we had no complaint about the fuel consumption, better than 30mpg in both cases, and we also liked the five-speed manual gearbox: 'A saving grace is the remarkably positive feel of the gearshift that helps unlock what little strength both engines might be hiding, unlike the optional four-speed automatic on the 2.0-litre which jumps between ratios in a demented fashion.'

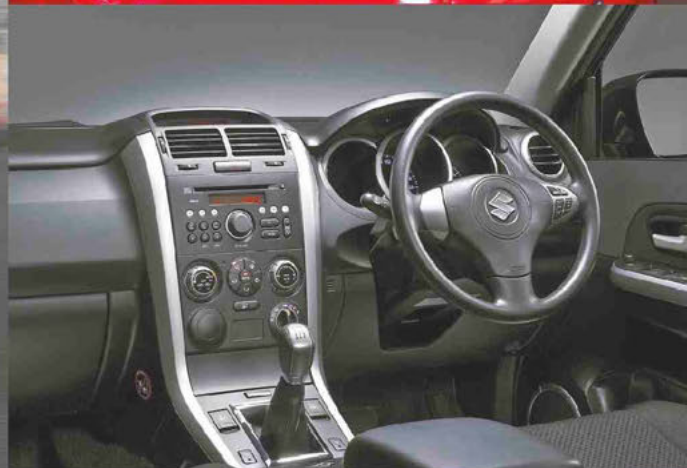
We mostly liked the interior: 'The improvement in quality is pronounced, with a sharper, more youthful design highlighted by graphite-effect plastic trim on the centre console, around the three-dial instrument readout and on the door pulls. The shiny rectangular chrome bezel around the gear lever is singularly out of place, but the driving position is easy to get on with, with good knee clearance and plenty of pedal space.' Ultimately it came down to money: 'Suzuki's key element has to be its pricing, but with established rivals like the Toyota Rav4 and the Korean surge of cars like the Kia Sportage, it isn't going to be easy.'

It was only natural, then, that we should put that comment to the test. When we eventually got our hands on a UK specification car, which coincided with the arrival of the DDiS turbodiesel engine, we pitted it in a three-way shootout with the RAV4 in XT5 2.2 D-4D form and a Sportage 2.0 CRD XE. And we were right to suggest it wouldn't be an easy match for the Suzuki. Bearing in mind that the Toyota

Right: There is a simplicity to the Grand Vitara's overall design that makes it a class above a lot of SUV shapes

Below: Engine options start at 1.6-litre and rise to the 166bhp 2.4-litre, which when offered in a small three door version of the Grand Vitara produces spritely progress!





was over £8000 more expensive than either of the others, our verdict said: 'The RAV4 is a great on-roader, but the price lets it down. The Grand Vitara doesn't offer quite the value for money you'd expect at around £17,000. After many years in limbo it's a shame how downmarket the new Suzuki feels. Top honours have to go to the Kia. It has the least power and the least desirable badge of our trio, but all-round performance is good, and practicality is unchallenged.'

We'd still rate the Grand Vitara as being underpowered and less refined than its class rivals, but that doesn't mean we dislike the car. In one area it proved its worth as a reasonably priced but competent alternative - off-road. In our January 2008 issue we reported on a Welsh off-road adventure with a turbodiesel three-door. We wrote: 'It was apparent that a potential weak spot is the large plastic front and rear bumpers. It would be so easy to catch one of these on an obstacle and cause some expensive cosmetic damage. On the upside, the air intake for the engine is at the top of the grille, meaning that water would have to be very deep to cause mechanical damage. Ground clearance looked limited but there was nothing vulnerable hanging down. With the Suzuki in low box we tackled the rutted green lane.'

'Ground clearance was a limiting factor, requiring a careful choice of line especially through Land Rover-sized ruts where it would have been easy to become high-centred. Other than this, the Grand Vitara impressed on a tricky route on standard road tyres. Low range first gear allowed snail's pace

driving around rocks and ruts without kangarooing. It was a practical test proving that if you want an economical diesel country car with more off-road capability than some of its rivals, the Grand Vitara is definitely one to consider.'

WHICH ONE TO BUY

The original range was limited with the 1.6 16v three-door, from a pricing point of view, being the entry-level model, but like the 2.0 16v five-door it had impressive convenience and comfort equipment including remote central locking, electric windows, a stereo with steering wheel-mounted controls and climate control air conditioning. The '+ version has alloy wheels, heated door mirrors and driving lamps. The automatic, originally available only with the 2.0-litre petrol engine, added around £1500 to the purchase price. Though priced at a budget level to begin with, even the base Grand Vitaras have held their value well, so you could still be paying £2000 for a good-condition but high-mileage 10-year old example, more like £3000 for anything with under 100,000 on the clock; a rare find was the red 55,000-mile 1.6 SE 3-door, MOT to September, a bargain at £2650, priced to clear at Trade Sales of Bristol (07789 003322). Hut Green Garage of Eggborough (01977 661055) had a 2006 2.0-litre five-door, 89,000 miles but a well-maintained one-owner car with stainless steel bull bar on offer at £2990.

A high-specification model, the X-EC, joined the range for 2008, boasting cruise control, unique Azure Grey Pearl metallic paint with silver roof rails,

Top: If you regularly need luggage space, then it has to be a five door model as the three door is limited in rear space

Above: Like the exterior, the Grand Vitara is a practical and perhaps a little conservative in design but certainly neat and functional

Specifications

Suzuki Grand Vitara

1.6 16v

Engine:	4cyl@1590cc
Power:	105bhp@6000rpm
Torque:	106lb ft@4500rpm

2.0

Engine:	4cyl@1995cc
Power:	138bhp@6000rpm
Torque:	135lb ft@4000rpm

1.9 DDIS

Engine:	4cyl@1870cc
Power:	127bhp@3750rpm
Torque:	221lb ft@2000rpm

2.4

Engine:	4cyl@2393cc
Power:	166bhp@6000rpm
Torque:	167lb ft@3800rpm

Transmission

Gearbox:	Five-speed manual four-speed auto
4WD:	Permanent

Suspension

Front: Independent, MacPherson struts

Rear: Independent, multilink, coil springs

Brakes: Ventilated discs front, drums rear
2.0/2.4: Ventilated discs front and rear

Tyres:	225/65R17, 255/60R18
Length:	4470mm
Width:	1810mm
Height:	1695mm
Weight:	1660kg
Towing capacity:	1700-2000kg

BUYING USED

Suzuki Grand Vitara



◀ 10-spoke 17-inch alloys, silver bonnet trim and black side mouldings. The Alcantara upholstery and leather-trimmed steering wheel added a touch of opulence, as did the enhanced satnav and the electric sunroof. Dubizzel of Wembley (07716 181816) were offering a pristine 2009 example, a well maintained 26,000-miler - a real one lady owner car - for £8495, MOT to Feb 2016 and a three-month warranty.

The range expanded with SZ3 as the lower-end trim, though this did include an enhanced stereo with speed-sensitive volume control; expect to pay around £6000 for a clean reasonable-mileage 2009 or 2010 3-door. The SZ4 and range-topping SZ5 have 18-inch alloys, front driving lamps, an in-dash 6-disc autochanger and heated leather seats. Farrell of Glasgow (01418 914999) were offering a metallic grey 2010 SZ4 with the 1.9 DDiS engine and

45,000 miles for £8700, a car in excellent condition with metallic paint and tow bar, full dealer history, a year's MOT and six month's warranty. The SZ5 also has cruise control, high-end stereo, electric sunroof and keyless start and used prices will be keen to match; Arnold Clark of Bishopbriggs (01413 059411) were offering a silver one-owner car on a 61 plate and 31,000 miles at a sale price of £11,500.

Look out for the limited edition SZ-T, based on the five-door 1.9DDiS but with a different design of 18-inch alloys, contrasting seat fabric, bonnet side vents and turn signal lamps built into the door mirrors. Significantly, this has a tailgate-mounted spare, along with the cruise control and keyless start features. Only 500 were made so they'll be rare second-hand, London Road Car Sales of Romford (01708 320310) had a black metallic 2012 example with

34,000 miles, in mint condition with a year's MOT and 6 months' warranty for £12,499.

Naturally the DDiS versions will be the most desirable if economy is important, but the 2.4 petrol version does add almost sporty driving excitement to the Grand Vitara SUV equation, pay £6000 for an early 2009 SZ4 five-door, £11,000 for a low-mileage 2012 3-door.

With dealers keen to shift the last remaining stocks of Grand Vitara to make way for the new Vitara, look out for good deals on nearly new cars, in particular pre-registered cars that haven't yet sold. There aren't that many around, but dealers are knocking around £1500 off the list price on some examples. Sturgess of Leicester (01164 161032) were offering a 2.4 SZ5 5-door, with just 25 miles on it, for £20,000 (list price £21,570), Heathrow Suzuki (01784 335969) were offering a three-door 1.6 SZ3, a pre-registered car but new with just 20 miles on it, for £14,499, again nearly £1500 off the list price, Norton Way of Letchworth (01462 754424) had a DDiS SZ5 with 50 miles at £20,495 against the new list price of £23,875.

LOOK OUT FOR ENGINE

One advantage of an engine that isn't tuned for performance is that long-term reliability is enhanced, so there aren't many common failures on any of the Grand Vitara power plants, though it's worth checking for leaks or squeaks from the water pump, particularly on the turbodiesel, because a seized pump can strip the timing belt and cause serious damage. On the diesels it's worth changing the water pump along

Top: Spare wheel is located on the rear door, but that allows for more interior luggage space

Above: Certainly comfortable for four adults

with the regular timing belt change just to be sure. With newer diesels fitted with diesel particulate filters make sure the engine revs freely and pulls strongly, a clogged filter can be ridiculously expensive to replace.

DRIVETRAIN

There don't appear to be any common faults with either the manual or automatic transmissions, so it's a matter of general checks such as making sure the manual selects gears smoothly, any crunching suggests wear to the synchromesh - particularly on cars that have been used for towing, where the mild engine performance might have required many a snatched downshift under load. The clutch might also have taken a beating on a car used for towing - the Grand Vitara is rated to pull up to two tonnes, which is quite a lot for a small-engined compact - so check the clutch takes up progressively and there isn't excessive pedal movement. Automatics tend to hunt between gears to cope with the mild power output of the petrol engine, but the changes shouldn't be jerky or accompanied by significant clonking or shunting from the propshafts.

CHASSIS

Check the brakes for excessive scoring of the discs, which might indicate that

the car's been used off-road - not necessarily a bad thing since it's designed for the purpose, but there might be other damage to sills and bumpers that may have been disguised under filler and paint. The rear brakes on the 1.6 are drums, it's worth checking the condition of the shoes which may be well worn on an older car - an MOT will confirm that the handbrake works, but it won't tell you if the linings are down to their last useful millimetre. Reject a car that knocks or rattles when running over potholes, it could just be worn bushes but replacing ball joints can be expensive.

Below: A timeless design, the Grand Vitara's looks will not age

BODY AND INTERIOR

Some of the interior plastics were still of a cheap 'n cheerful nature, so may show more than average evidence of wear and tear - check for signs that scuffs and scratches have been disguised by colour polish. If you're going for one of the 2010-on models lacking a spare wheel make sure that the sealant and inflation kit is still intact - the previous owner might have used it and forgotten to replace it. On an earlier car with a tailgate-mounted spare, make sure the door opens and closes cleanly and hasn't sagged on its hinges. Check that all electrical items work properly. **4x4**



Or you could consider...



KIA SPORTAGE

Even in its earlier guise the Sportage is worth considering, because it offered excellent value for money with good equipment and a comfortable five-seater interior, not to mention the seven-year warranty that should still apply to nearly new used examples. It's more practical than the Grand Vitara in having a clever 'fold and dive' arrangement that has the rear seats folding down to floor level, a failing in the Suzuki where the rear seats don't fold all the way. Pricing of second-hand examples is roughly at the same level as the Suzuki, a reflection of the Kia's growing reputation for reliability. The revised model from 2010 is more stylish in an urban SUV way, also bigger and with more powerful and refined engines. Not as competent off-road as the Grand Vitara since it lacks low range gearing.



SUBARU FORESTER

On the basis that anyone considering a Grand Vitara isn't necessarily looking for something with cutting-edge modern styling, may we suggest a Forester as a conservatively styled but much more practical alternative? With its boxer engines even without bags of power the Forester is also a good car to drive; refinement, build quality and interior appointments outclass the Suzuki even in the earlier generations. The new model for 2008 included a lusty boxer diesel engine, but reliability isn't as good as it should be so we'd recommend sticking with the tried and trusted petrol units. The Subaru is also very competent in off-road conditions, with particularly comfortable ride quality over rough surfaces. You might have to pay a bit more than you would for a Grand Vitara, but it could be worth it.



SSANGYONG KORANDO

Perhaps unfair to include this as an option for anyone looking for a budget-priced older car to use as an off-road plaything, because it's only been around for five years, lacks low-range gearing and you'll need at least £10,000 to get into an early example. However, while it can't match the Suzuki as an off-roader the Giugiaro-designed five-door estate makes a stylish, comfortable, economical and good-performing road-biased family SUV; another positive point is the 250,000-mile warranty, something for the high-mileage user to take into account if considering a nearly-new car. Don't just jump into the first one you see in your price range, because most will be two-wheel drive versions, so do make sure you're getting one of the rarer 4x4s. Go for a post-2012 example with the revised more efficient 2.0-litre turbodiesel.

ODDBALLS

FORGOTTEN 4X4S

PERODUA KEMBARA

This badge-engineered version of the first-generation Daihatsu Terios has something of a cult following in its Malaysian homeland. Paul Guinness explains more

Let's face it, Perodua isn't exactly a big name on the UK motoring scene, despite this Malaysian brand having been here since 1997. That was when the company started bringing in a few hundred cars each year, kicking off with the minuscule Nippa that eventually got usurped by models like the Kenari, Kelisa and – more recently – the Myvi. The sad news for Perodua fans, however, is that imports ceased early last year and no more new cars will be sold in Britain – at least for the time being.

I can tell you're upset. "What are we to do without brand new Peroduas being available?" you're bound to be asking. Or not. Let's be honest, only a handful of motorists will notice the marque's UK demise. And as the existing customer base tends to be folk of more mature years who traditionally hang on to their cars far longer than most of us do, it'll be some time before even Perodua's followers realise it's gone.

Fortunately for Perodua, the brand continues to enjoy a major following in its Malaysian homeland, where it's known not just for city cars and superminis but also for the 4x4 you see before you: the Perodua Kembara. (That's Kembara, not Ken Barlow.) And before anyone says anything, yes it does look remarkably like a first-generation Daihatsu Terios.

That's because Perodua – which is Malaysia's second largest vehicle manufacturer after Proton – is 25 per cent owned by Daihatsu, the Japanese car maker in which Toyota has a controlling interest. And so it comes as no surprise to learn that most of the Peroduas offered since the company's formation in the early 1990s have been locally assembled versions of Daihatsu designs.

That includes the Kembara, which is all but identical to the Terios where it matters. That means it looks virtually the same (trim and badging aside), is powered by Daihatsu's eager little 1298cc 16-valve petrol engine, and features the same full-time all-wheel drive system (with locking centre diff) as the Terios. And yet its maker makes no reference to Daihatsu in its marketing of this compact 4x4, insisting instead that "the exciting Perodua Kembara was engineered from the ground up as a compact sports utility vehicle that's fun, stylish, and versatile".

Neither does Perodua's marketing of the Kembara mention the fact that this ultra-narrow 4x4 is tight on space, choppy to drive and rather roly-poly in the corners, insisting instead that it has a "roomy, comfortable cabin that makes every ride a pleasure".

Rather impressively, the Kembara remained in production in Malaysia until 2008, and nowadays is a popular used buy – even among the off-roader community, where Perodua's 4x4 is the default choice for modifiers and mud-pluggers alike. It's a funny old world...



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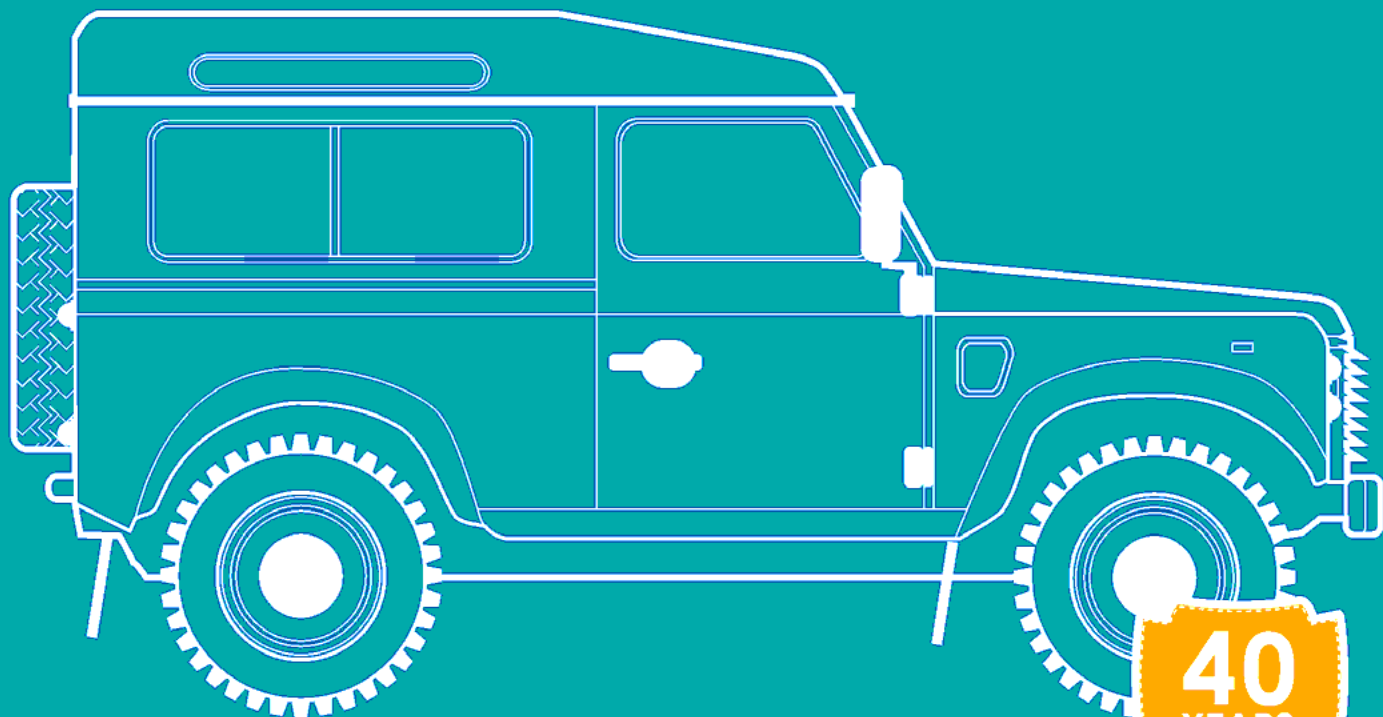
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COUNTY SWB



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DEFENDER 90



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DISCOVERY 90



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FREELANDER



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FREELANDER 2



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SERIES II



1960, £3,250. 4.203 eng, tax exempt, MoT September 2015, no chassis rust, body good, new Wheel cylinders and brakes, respray 3 years ago. Devon. 01395 597656

SERIES IIA



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MITSUBISHI

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1990, £5,350. Eiddis, fridge, sink, 12V/240V, lots of room in the back, 3 berth, RAC/AA, not been smoked in, luxury upholstery, long MoT, P/x on Land = boat mooring or big L/up f/h or WHY. Essex. 07778 334567

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£700. BTC 24 ft artc trailer complete with vacuum brake equipment chassis in good condition for age on a 5th wheel coupling dolly included. 01569 762279 (MU)

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£any reasonable offer. Smallholder. Hay Lades available. Somerset. 07793 983531 (JW)

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YORK/SIDT40103



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We ask the experts. Plus accessory review**

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Toyota Land Cruiser

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Contents subject to alteration



**All this in the June issue of 4x4 Magazine
On sale Friday 1st May**

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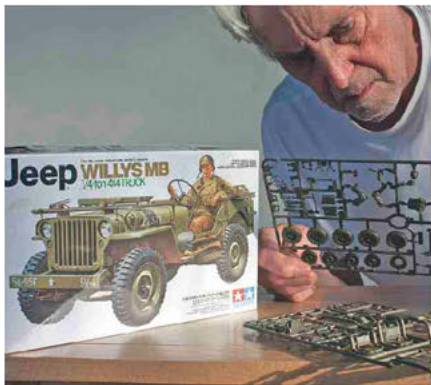
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Off the track

When it comes to making models I prefer eight-wheel drive to four-wheel drive, but that's no reason not to read on - there's some genuine Jeep activity on the other side of the railway line

I wouldn't admit this to anyone else, so I hope you guys won't spread this around. When it comes to making models I don't generally do cars, and I hope I won't be dismissed as an anoraky trainspotter type when I explain that I prefer to make model steam engines - and I hope particularly that Scottish reader Ian Sneddon won't think any the less of me for it.

Not just any old steam engines, just some of the more noteworthy ones that ran on the South African Railways, my interest stemming from the fact that my old dad and his dad before him worked as engineers on the locomotives of that expansive rail network. The last model I made was of an SAR Class 23, if anyone does happen to be interested I'll include the fact that it was a two-cylinder, non-articulated 4-8-2 with a tractive effort of nearly 20,000kg, heavier and stronger than BR's own 9F heavy goods locomotive.

My interest in that particular steamer is that it was designed as a fast passenger engine, and since it was ordered at the time LNER's magnificent Mallard took the world steam speed record, there was a plan to give it a streamlined cladding - until the accountants worked out that streamlining would add £700 to the cost of each engine. It was still a magnificent machine (in the way a Willys Jeep is magnificent in the eyes of modern Jeep enthusiasts, but that, I accept, is not a good enough reason for going on about it), so I'll just point out a little link that might be of interest to Ian - many of the steam engines for the SAR were built at Glasgow's Springburn works - is that massive SAR Garratt still on display where the works used to be?

The reason model-making came to mind is that the aforementioned Ian, a member of the Scotland West All-Terrain Club and one of the Scotia Winch Club's Event Team, sent me a delightful diorama showing a Jeep perched in



My kind of model - an SAR Class 23 steamer

suitably charismatic fashion on a pile of rocks and logs with a straggly leafless tree in the background. The accompanying note was a pleasure to read. Ian says: "Just a note to say thanks for your input in the magazine. I have a Cherokee Limited 3.7 V6 gas-fuelled, also a Defender for the murky stuff." Referring to the diorama, he says: "I do these models for punch hunts to help keep the fun and skills going in and around the Glasgow area." Good one, Ian.

Dioramas are quite popular among Jeep modelers, a quick browse on the internet reveals dozens of images, hardly surprising most of them involving early Willys trucks in military situations - still, one of the wackiest has to be the depiction of a Roswell incident complete with its associated spacecraft and aliens. Inspired by these and Ian's creation, it's also possible that I might put steam engines aside for a while and attempt a Willys diorama of my own, a decision made all the more likely on account of a nephew having given me a

1/35 scale model of an MB for Christmas. It's a fine-scale Tamiya kit, which I note with pleasure includes, "a lifelike figure and plentiful accessory parts" - the latter including a 50-calibre machine gun, a Garand carbine (actually on closer inspection I think it's a Springfield, clarifying input from anoraks welcome) and a holstered Thompson .45 sub-machine gun.

But don't hold your breath - the detail on the kit is right up there with anorak interest levels, including a separate little cooling fan for the engine, and delicate little gear and transfer levers, so it's going to take me a while to put the car together (not to mention the driver, he comes in six separate parts - I assume six because his head must be in there somewhere) let alone create a realistic backdrop. None of which detracts from my pleasure at receiving Ian's mini-masterpiece, all the more interesting because seeing the model emerging from the box he'd sent it in immediately brought back a strong sense of déjà vu. The déjà feeling involved a Jeep that was red rather than black, but it was perched in a very similar fashion on a pile of logs and rocks with a straggly tree behind it. It was a scene I photographed more than a decade ago - so how's that for a stunning coincidence? I still view that image with pleasure as a memento of some superb hard-core off-roading, and Ian's model is now perched beside it on the sitting room sideboard. So, thank you very much Ian... and I hope you don't want it back. **Bob**



On the rocks - a Jeep diorama by Ian Sneddon...



...that brought back hard-core memories



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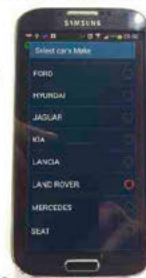


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Defender 2.4TDCi VGT Hybrid Turbo

The uprated Puma Defender 2.4 TDCi uprated hybrid turbo is designed to give more torque than the standard turbo, The standard turbo is quite small in comparison to our uprated Hybrid VGT which means it runs out of puff quite low in the rpm range. The uprated hybrid turbos main aim is to widen the torque curve over the standard turbo to help with mid range and top end power. The turbo allows a more free revving engine, stronger mid range power delivery and a nicer overall drive. **This turbo is designed to work with a correctly matched turbo remapped car.**

£895.00 exc VAT



Silicone Hoses

300TDI Hose Set- Black	£56.00
300TDI Hose Set- Blue	£56.00
D3 & RRS 2.7L TDV6 Hose- Black	£75.00
D3 & RRS 2.7L TDV6 Hose- Blue	£75.00
Puma 2.2L Hose Kit- Black	£88.50
Puma 2.2L Hose Set- Blue	£88.50
Puma 2.4L Hose Set- Black	£88.50
TD5 Defender Hose Set- Black	£60.00
TD5 Defender Hose Set- Blue	£60.00
TD5 Discovery Hose Set- Black	£60.00
TD5 Discovery Hose Set- Blue	£60.00



All prices excluding VAT

TDV6 EGR Blanking Kit Pre 07

TDV6 2.7L Egr Blanking bypass Kit designed for MY05 & MY06 cars.

This kit is designed for both Discovery 3 & RangeRover Sport as well as the Jaguar 2.7L TDV6 models.

If your chassis number is a 5A or 6A chassis number this kit is compatible. EG: SALLAAA12(5/6)A123456.

The BAS TDV6 2.7L EGR blanking or EGR bypass kit as its also known is made from Hi Grade Stainless Steel, supplied in the kit are a set of high temperature resistant seals that are fully compatible with oil and fuel contamination from the inlet gasses of the modern engine. A double seal setup is used for added quality and pressure resistance.

£45.50 exc VAT



300TDI Defender Discovery VGT Hybrid Turbo

300 TDI Defender and Discovery Manual or Auto **Variable Geometry Turbo** hybrid conversion is the world's first bolt on Variable Geometry Turbo conversion for all 300 TDI powered Land Rovers.

This turbo uses your existing manifold ends pipes "Bull Horns" from your old removed turbo, though they are available separately from our web shop if required. NOTE: Manifold gasket NOT supplied as part of the turbo kit.

This is based on an exchange for your old standard 300 TDI Turbo returned back to us (a surcharge of £50 will be charged until we receive your old turbo - which must be complete and in basic working order).

£895.00 exc VAT



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The world's first winch with a
remote controlled clutch



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The ZEON Platinum™ is available in three different model types. Both 10k & 12k capacities are available with wire rope, with the 10k model also having a synthetic rope option. All 3 variations of the winch come complete with WARN's new advanced wireless remote, which completely eliminates the need for a manual clutch.

Further details and your local distributor can be found by contacting Arbil today on 0845 600 4556.

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